

Assignment Instructions:

Read the cultural situations presented below. Choose any three situations for further analysis.

Analyze the situation based on the information learned in class and the values of the countries listed below. For each situation you are to:

Write the name of the situation (i.e., Opening a Franchise in Colombia, Where Did We go Wrong? etc.)

On the next line, write the countries involved and the names of the parties involved for each country. For example: USA- Steve Marshall, Israel – Israeli Team.

For each country identify the value or values that are being demonstrated in the situation. Following the example above, you have to describe which American value or values Steve Marshall is reflecting about the American culture. Do the same for the Israeli Team.

Wear the colored glasses of the opposite party and describe how the actions of that party could be perceived negatively from the perspective of the other party. For example, how the actions of Mr. Marshall could be interpreted negatively by the Israeli team and vice versa, based on the values described in c.

In an effort to resolve the issue at hand, what could each party do to accommodate the other side? What could be done differently next time? What are some practical tips each party should implement if a situation like this were to happen again? What can each party learn from each other?

Note: this assignment is worth more than the ones we have done so far because it requires more reading, analytical skills, etc. Plan your work accordingly.

CULTURAL SITUATIONS

No one can predict what another person will think, do, or say. However, understanding the values that may influence our colleagues and neighbors can offer useful ideas about what to expect and how to work with someone from a culture different than our own. Culture not only affects who and how we are, but culture influences what we see and how we see it. Imagine looking at the world through various colored glasses. The Lens may color or filter what we perceive in a situation, thus impacting how we behave.

What
are



“values”? Values are standards of what we deem acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong, important or unimportant, good or bad. They represent the “central tendencies” of what a group of people is taught as being important and virtuous. Cultural values are the principles that guide how we should think and act as honorable and contributing

members of our society. Values represent beliefs and attitudes that drive personal behavior, business practices, and political decisions. Our behavior is based on the values we have learned, both explicitly and unconsciously, through our families, communities, places of worship, schools, and the media. Values interact with and influence one another, and many of them overlap.

Finalizing a Contract

A team of three negotiators from a US telecommunications company arrives in Colombia to sign an agreement with a potential customer. They have been working with this customer, a medium-sized company, for the last six months through their subsidiary in Cali. Numerous proposals and counterproposals have already been exchanged, and the US team thinks that closing the deal is imminent.

As the meeting begins, the US team attempts to quickly move through their final points, going over the things that they think need to be clarified. They are particularly frustrated in not being able to engage the Colombians in a quick forecasting of near-term business environmental risks; certainly their customers have useful information to provide about this. However, the Colombian team continues to talk about topics seemingly unrelated to the business at hand. For the US team, the Colombians seem to be more interested in drinking coffee than talking business. The US Americans are also annoyed by a stream of visitors and phone calls that interrupt the meeting.

The Colombian customers struggle to follow the conversation in fast-spoken US English, full of idioms and slang. They frequently need to clarify for each other, in Spanish, their understanding of what is going on. In particular, they cannot understand why a US corporate lawyer is present at the meeting, because he doesn't seem to know anything about the product. It is a confusing meeting and they can't understand why the US Americans seem in such a hurry.

Although the visit is cordial, the US team is disappointed that the conversations do not result in a signed contract before they are scheduled to leave Colombia. They don't understand what went wrong.

Questions: If you see the situation from the lenses of the Colombian customers, why

Opening a Franchise in Colombia

Steve Marshall is a successful sales manager in the USA and has purchased a franchise to develop a business in Colombia. He moves to Bogotá and begins to contact people in different local business-related entities such as the Chamber of Commerce, as well as successful local entrepreneurs. He soon notices several things that surprise him, and, in some cases, that he feels undermine the successful development of his business.

One thing is that Steve invests a huge amount of time trying to arrange meetings with people. They tell him, "Yes, I will be there!" but then they don't show up, or they show up five to ten minutes after the agreed upon time or even later.

During the few meetings when people have shown up, he tries to speak slowly and clearly and it seems that people understand him. Later he realizes, however, that he must not have communicated well, because people promise something but then they don't do it. He has heard through the grapevine that people have difficulty understanding him, though they've never said that to him directly.

Steve also notices that during some meetings potential partners seem not to be listening. They interrupt him when he speaks, and they do other things during the conversation, such as taking phone calls, answering emails, talking with secretaries, giving orders to assistants, and drinking coffee.

Steve is surprised by this rudeness, and feels it is disrespectful. He wonders, "Do these potential partners all have ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)?" If so, he feels it disqualifies them as partners in his plans to expand into Colombia. Steve is now thinking of looking for other possible partners.

Finally, Steve is somewhat frustrated because he notes that potential partners do not arrive on time to meetings. They agree to meet at a certain time, but they do not arrive until somewhat later. Plus, they are not answering his emails.

For their part, several of the potential Colombian partners are interested in possibly working with Steve. They want to know him better, and learn more about the venture. They find him at times difficult to understand, and rather impatient. They wish he would take the time to get to know them so they could see if they wanted to do business together.

Steve has been planning for the franchise to begin to be profitable within three months, but he is now observing that it may take more time. This reality is affecting his budget and also impacting development of the franchise in Colombia. Steve needs to improve his effectiveness, and quickly!

Will This Joint Venture Work?

Amit Segal is from Haifa, Israel, and is managing an acquisition of an engineering company in Bogotá, Colombia. Amit has been invited to a meeting with Mr. Perez in Bogotá's El Nogal club. Mr. Perez is the outsourcing manager of Ecopetrol, one of the largest companies in the Colombian oil sector, and a very important potential client for Amit's company.

For the meeting, Amit shows up wearing dress pants and a buttoned shirt, which makes his Colombian employees who are present very uncomfortable. They think that Amit should have worn a formal suit and tie, as they have; of course, they say nothing then. After the meeting, the employees talk among themselves, "Amit is so informal! How he can be the boss?" In spite of his clothing, Amit receives an interesting proposal from Mr. Perez, and he is ready to work on it.

Later in the month, Amit's partners arrive from Israel, and they hold a meeting with the Colombian employees in the office to discuss the Ecopetrol project. The meeting is run in English, and the conversation is loud and fast-paced. Later Sandra, one of Amit's Colombian employees, tells a friend, "During the meeting, the Israeli partners seemed to be fighting with each other. They were talking loudly and using a lot of gestures—it was very strange."

At the conclusion of the meeting, the partners decide to invite a second company, run by Mr. Rodriguez, to join them as partners in the project. Mr. Rodriguez' company has the equipment needed to meet the Ecopetrol project requirements, and they know his sophisticated machines will be a good addition to the project since they used the same machines in Israel with great results.

Amit invites Mr. Rodriguez to test one of his machines to see if it can meet Ecopetrol's standards for the project. Amit tells Mr. Rodriguez's employees to place the machine in a specific place with a specific configuration. Receiving no indications to the contrary, Amit thinks that Mr. Rodriguez's employees understand him. Later he finds out that they have configured the machine incorrectly. It seems that Mr. Rodriguez's employees did not understand Amit when he gave them the instructions. He wonders why they didn't tell him directly at the time? For a moment, Amit recalls that sometimes this happens in his office—some of his employees do not tell him when they disagree with him or don't understand him.

Amit decides to show how it is supposed to be done, and to re-configure the machine on the spot. In front of Mr. Rodriguez and his employees, Amit takes off his shirt and proceeds to configure it correctly. Amit is confused when Mr. Rodriguez tells him later in private: "How could you do that in front of everybody? It is not the job of the boss!" However, Amit is happy because the machine is now configured correctly. In addition, he has decided that through partnering with Mr. Rodriguez, they can accomplish the Ecopetrol project.

Why Won't They Return My Call?

Mr. Yamaguchi is from Tokyo, Japan. A year ago he heard about an opportunity to market Colombian products in Japan, and he plans to begin importing some Colombian products soon. Mr. Yamaguchi has traveled to Colombia a few times,

finds the country very beautiful, has made some Colombian friends, and is studying Spanish in order to help him to conduct business there more smoothly.

Mr. Yamaguchi is surprised, however, when he visits the city of Barranquilla, to meet with potential partners. Despite his language studies, he finds it difficult to read the Spanish language menu in restaurants, and is even unable to order his breakfast. One time, he thinks the waitress has understood his order, but she brings him eggs cooked over-easy rather than scrambled. This area seems to be very different than Bogotá!

He also finds Colombian money confusing, and almost uses 50,000 peso bills as 50 peso bills, because the numbers are not fully spelled out on the Colombian bills. This area seems to be very different than Bogotá! Despite his learning curve, Mr. Yamaguchi continues to be optimistic about his new ventures. He meets with Jorge, a possible exporter, in Santa Martha port. Together they meet with Nelson, a port intermediary, in the Santa Martha port offices. During the meeting, which is conducted in Spanish, Nelson and Jorge start the conversation talking about business, but they speak quickly and don't allow enough time for the translator to put everything into English for Mr. Yamaguchi.



Mr. Yamaguchi is concerned that they may be giving him incorrect information. He starts to hesitate about Nelson's prices. When Mr. Yamaguchi asks, "Who will be the exporter?" Nelson and Jorge seem unable to answer the question directly; they begin to talk about who will bring the material and how the money is managed. Mr. Yamaguchi is frustrated and stops the meeting and asks, again, "Who will be the exporter?" Finally, Nelson and Jorge answer that Nelson is the exporter. Mr. Yamaguchi is surprised by this, as he expected it to be Jorge, and he feels uncomfortable that it takes the men so long to answer any of his questions.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Colombians start to talk about their families and tell stories about past times together. Mr. Yamaguchi thinks the meeting is finished and they just are wasting time, so he decides to leave the meeting and go outside to shop for some souvenirs. He has little time during this business trip to Colombia and he has a lot to do. Since he doesn't understand Spanish very well anyway, he says goodbye and leaves the meeting.

Nelson and Jorge are disappointed that Mr. Yamaguchi is so quiet and passive and doesn't want to spend some time talking—at the end of a meeting not everything is about business. Mr. Yamaguchi does not seem to want to get to know them, and doesn't seem to enjoy their conversation.

Later in the month, Mr. Yamaguchi calls from Japan to speak with Nelson and Jorge. Neither one answers his phone call, so he leaves messages. Nobody returns his voice mails. Mr. Yamaguchi had heard that Colombians like business, but somebody told him that people from the coast are different: they are "more relajados." They tend to be more relaxed and less focused on work than the people from Bogotá, and more likely to just live to enjoy life and family.

Mr. Yamaguchi is beginning to think that the cultural differences are much more significant than he anticipated. Perhaps he should cancel his plans to import Colombian goods, or, at least, he should set a new budget and timeframe to launch the venture.

Where Did We Go Wrong?

Dr. Velandia, a Colombian, is the head of human resources in a large Colombian firm, a position she has held for many years. She has an outstanding reputation in the Human Resources field in Colombia. Dr. Velandia has worked for American companies in the past, but her boss has always been a Colombian educated in the United States.

Last year, the company she works for was acquired by a German firm. Mr. Guttenberg is the German production manager brought in to supervise the merger. Suddenly, Dr. Velandia has a German boss and several German coworkers.

When the company was acquired, she was told: “Everything will be the same, just with new management from Germany. There will be no problems. After all, we are all human beings, basically the same—but we just speak different languages.”

The new company policy is that all employees will only speak English on the job. Dr. Velandia doesn’t know how to speak English, but along with several other Colombian and German employees, she is taking classes to learn.

Lately, she has heard several complaints in her previously harmonious workplace. One day, for example, Mr. Guttenberg loudly criticizes the Colombian workers: “Colombians promise to give a report and they don’t do it. They just don’t tell the truth, and it seems like it happens frequently. They promise to do something and then they don’t.” Mr. Guttenberg says this in front of everybody, and the employees are very hurt.

Another day one of the Colombian finance managers, Mr. Rocha, says privately to Dr. Velandia, “The Germans take too much time to reach a decision, and then they change their minds after a decision is reached. I don’t understand these Germans. They don’t enjoy their time together, and don’t show any emotion. It is very difficult to read them.” Other Colombians feel that the Germans are impolite in some ways, and complain that the Colombians and Germans are not working well together.

Dr. Velandia has also found that her Colombian coworkers are losing motivation to stay with the company. Since the Germans acquired the company, many former employees have gone to work for the competition.

If Somebody Gives You Papaya, Take the Papaya



Mr. Balder is an American professional who came to Colombia to study and fell in love with the country. When he finished his studies, he decided to stay. Mr. Balder knows that Colombia is a country rich with people who have a great deal of potential. He has partnered with some people in US, and has set up a non-profit organization in Colombia to help Colombians. A group of American investors fund his ventures.

Mr. Balder has encountered a few problems that could impact his venture. Some of his suppliers promise certain prices, and then don’t keep their word. It seems to Mr. Balder that Colombians are lying to him, and maybe taking advantage of him. Additionally, he has found that there are a tremendous number of procedures that take a lot of time.

For example, he wants to rent an office and is surprised just how much paperwork he has to do—in Cleveland, such procedures would only take a few minutes, but here it takes days and weeks. Too much time is invested in opening a bank account and in other government procedures. Maybe Colombians don’t trust anyone. He heard a negotiation tip from a Colombian friend: “Remember: don’t give papaya in Colombia, and if somebody gives you papaya, take the papaya.” He is not sure if this applies to his business, but he spends a long time thinking about this Colombian proverb and whether it impacts his venture.

Mr. Balder decides to talk with Julian, one of his best employees. After assuring him that it is okay to speak directly, he asks Julian for feedback. Julian says, “Mr. Balder, you are the boss. You tell us what to do, and we do it. Don’t ask us what we have to do, you are the boss.” Later, Julian tells one of his co-workers, “Mr. Balder doesn’t know what to do; maybe Mr. Balder should not be the manager.”

Mr. Balder overhears this and thinks that Julian sees him as a weak manager. Mr. Balder decides that if Julian sees him as weak, he will fire Julian, and then Julian and the other employees will understand who is the boss. Julian doesn’t know it, but he is about to lose his job, and he is one of Mr. Balder’s most brilliant employees.

Can We Establish This Alliance?

Robert Paulson is from New York, where he owns a company that produces locks, both in US and internationally. Robert meets Oscar Rojas, the owner of a Colombian company that produces locks in Bogotá. Oscar invites Robert to visit his company, in hopes of beginning a business relationship, and they agree to meet in August in Bogotá.

Oscar begins planning to make Robert feel at home. He arranges a beautiful lunch in San Isidro, one of the best restaurants in Monserrate. Oscar also wants to show Robert some of Colombia's culture, so he arranges a private show at Robert's hotel for the last night of the visit. He is sure that Robert will enjoy experiencing the culture and viewing some of the finest Colombian dancers. Oscar knows business is important, but friendship and courtesy will help to close the deal.

Robert also wants to make it a productive trip, and carefully plans his schedule for his visit to Bogotá. He plans to meet one or two other potential partners in addition to Oscar.

Everything is ready for the visit. Robert arrives in Bogota with his tightly planned schedule, trying to make the most of his trip. His first surprise is that a limousine picks him up in the airport, and he finds that he has been assigned a driver. But he is more surprised when he arrives at Oscar's company and finds the staff has prepared a welcome party for him! The ladies have made some traditional desserts, including the famous Colombian empanada. He has never seen empanadas, but he tries them and likes them.

Later in the morning, after the "little" welcome party that lasts an hour and a half, Oscar shows Robert around the company. Robert has several important topics that he wants to cover during the day, so he is surprised when after the tour he is invited to lunch with the management team. When he arrives, the first question he is asked is, "What kind of drink do you prefer?"

The lunch extends for four hours and, to Robert's surprise, no business topics are discussed, as much as he tries to introduce them. Meanwhile, Oscar is surprised that Robert keeps bringing up business during lunch. After lunch, they visit some of Bogotá's nicest places, and Oscar tells Robert that he has arranged a special show the night before he leaves. Robert starts to wonder if Oscar really wants to do business.

The night before Robert leaves, he is working on the final details of an important project. He is shocked when Oscar arrives and invites him to a show he has arranged at the hotel, with dancers doing cumbias, salsa, and other Colombian dances. The show is interesting, and they eat and drink together, but again there is no business discussion.

Robert is glad when the show is finally over about 1:00 a.m. because they are supposed to meet the next day at 8:00 a.m. to close the deal. On the way out, Oscar's assistant tells Robert, "Since it is so late, it is no problem. We will meet at 10:00 a.m. in Oscar's office." Robert is planning to meet with another businessman in Bogotá at 10:00 a.m., and this change will definitely compromise his schedule.

Robert wonders if Oscar is serious about doing business with him. He is frustrated because Oscar has not respected his schedule.

Oscar is surprised how rude Robert is; he only wants to talk about business. He doesn't seem to enjoy their time together or all the special arrangements Oscar has made to help Robert feel at home in Colombia and get to know Colombian culture.

Surprises

Larry, a US team leader whose company is working on a joint project with Israeli colleagues, describes the face-to-face technical discussions.

"On the evening of our arrival we were picked up at the airport, welcomed warmly and treated to a terrific dinner in an

Israeli restaurant. We all joked about the difference between telephone conferences and actually meeting face-to-face. It was clear that we had broken the ice.

On the following day, we began our technical discussions. Actually, these first discussions were more in the nature of presentations by each team. Participants in the discussions included me, four members of my US team, four members of the Israeli team, and Yossi, the Israeli team leader, who chaired the meeting. Our agenda also included three action items on which we came to joint decisions.

Our agenda for the second day called for making decisions on a number of technical issues. The first surprise came as soon as we began our meeting. Yossi chaired this meeting as well. I noticed that some of the Israeli team members were having a heated discussion in Hebrew. Yossi said something to calm things down but it didn't seem to work. Voices were raised. They were interrupting each other and getting very emotional. I didn't understand what they were saying but it sounded like the meeting was about to burst into a fight. I noticed something else; the team members were arguing with Yossi and objecting to some of his statements.

After what seemed like an hour but was probably only five minutes, Yossi turned to us and apologized for the discussion in Hebrew. He explained that the team wanted to open up the previous day's action items for discussion, items that had already been finalized. This didn't make any sense to us, but I agreed reluctantly when Yossi said his team had come up with an even better solution to some of the technical issues discussed the previous day.

Because of the tension I'd noticed in the Israeli group, I suggested a fifteen-minute break. Then came the next surprise of the morning. As the Israeli team members left the room, they started joking around and patting each other on the back. It was as if they were best friends and no argument had taken place in that room only a few minutes ago.

After the break, we had a good discussion about the technical issues the Israelis had raised and came to a joint decision we could all live with. Everyone got along very well, although I noticed that my team members were a little subdued. I left the meeting with mixed impressions and some concern."

The Shortcut

An Israeli company manufacturing machines for the textile industry exports to countries around the world. One of the company's biggest clients is a German firm. Rafi is the head sales representative for the Israeli company. Part of his role is to be a liaison between his firm and the German client. He is in continuous contact with Karl, one of the German managers.

A few months ago, Karl called Rafi and asked him to send along information on the maintenance procedure for one of the components. Rafi was acquainted with the maintenance procedure but he also knew that carrying it out according to the written procedure was costly and difficult. The Israeli team had tried the procedure a couple of times and did not like it. After thinking about the issue for a while they came up with a creative shortcut. Although they had never documented the shortcut, the Israelis used it whenever this kind of maintenance was needed.

Rafi told his German colleague about the shortcut and offered to have one of the Israeli engineers walk the German engineers through the process. Karl refused flatly and asked for the "proper, documented procedure." Rafi attempted to explain the benefits of the shortcut and to persuade Karl to give it a try. His voice became louder and more animated as he tried to get Karl's agreement. Karl listened and then repeated his request for instructions for the formal procedure.

After this exchange, Rafi told his colleagues that the relationship between him and Karl had deteriorated. Karl now kept his discussions with Rafi to a minimum. He seldom asked for advice and when he did, his tone of voice had none of its former warmth. Rafi had the feeling that Karl no longer trusted him.

Neglect?

Five Thai computer engineers working for a multinational company were assigned to the Israeli branch of the same company for a six-month project. They were to work on joint teams with their Israeli colleagues. Some of the Thais were assigned to a team with an Israeli team leader. After three weeks, Chakrii, a Thai engineer, wrote the following e-mail to a friend back home. (He used his private e-mail and not the company's for reasons that will quickly become apparent!)

"I'm finding it difficult to get used to Rachel, my Israeli team leader. She expects me to sit down with her in order to define the goals of the piece of work she's assigned to me. I try to cooperate because I know that's the way they do things in this organization, but I'm really not sure what to say or what she wants from me. As if this weren't enough, I also have to deal with the way Rachel gives instructions. She doesn't define a task specifically. Instead, she leaves me on my own to take care of the details. When I come to her with questions, she looks annoyed, gives me a very general answer, and tells me she wants me to demonstrate more initiative. If I ask her to check my work to see whether I've carried out a task correctly, she tells me I should have more self-confidence. In fact, she's surprised that I haven't come up with anything new on my own. I'm beginning to feel unimportant, overwhelmed and neglected. I'm also starting to wonder how Rachel got to be a team leader. She wants us to do her work and make her decisions for her. She just doesn't pull her weight."

Rachel tells her version of the incident to an Israeli colleague:

"I always ask Chakrii to step into my office for a discussion about his assignment. That's our company culture all over the world. I explain how I see the project developing and how I see his role. I ask for his input. There isn't any. Instead he looks at me with a puzzled expression. Then I just give up and give him instructions for the week. I keep the instructions general and leave it to him to fill in the details. He is, after all, the engineer. He is supposed to know what he is doing. I don't want him to feel like I am taking away his freedom or his place. But this approach isn't working. Juan comes back to me at least three times a day to ask me to check his work. He always follows my instructions to the letter but doesn't come up with anything on his own. I'm beginning to wonder how long he's been working for the company and how he got assigned to this project."

Vishvakarma Pooja

Herbert Nelson, a US American, has been appointed as the new Plant Manager of a 50-year old Indian manufacturing unit located in a remote part of eastern India. This factory was recently acquired by a US-based engineering company, and his assignment is to turn it around within a year, rationalize its processes, and make it an efficient member of the company's global operations.

In his initial interactions with his Indian management team and the employees, he finds them very open and accepting about the change in ownership, and highly motivated and enthusiastic about the factory becoming part of the global operations. His initial suggestions for changing and improving systems have been accepted and implemented without much resistance.

Today, he just noticed that one of the weekdays this month is shown on the factory calendar as a holiday for Vishvakarma Pooja. On enquiring, Hari Kumar, his Personnel Manager, explains that this is a local holiday for worshipping Vishvakarma, the god of tools and machines. Though it is not a national holiday and therefore not mandatory for companies, it has been customary to close the operations on that day. While no work is performed, the workers and their families visit the factory to worship the machines with traditional rituals.

Herbert tells Hari that this is out of the question because it would interfere with the already planned production and delivery schedules. Moreover, performing worship with families inside the factory cannot be permitted. Herbert

instructs him to announce to the employees that from this year onward, the company will not give this holiday. Although Hari tries to advise him against this decision, he insists that abolishing the holiday will be beneficial for the company in the long run.

The next day, two trade union representatives come to Herbert's office and request that he reconsider his decision. They say that the company's recognition of Vishvakarma Pooja is a long-standing custom, and should not be done away with without consultation with workers.

Herbert tried to reason with them—though not very successfully—that he cannot let the personal religious beliefs of people interfere with work. He tells them that, if essential, employees can apply for official leave, which will be granted according to the company's policies. After a lot of discussion—though without any resolution—the trade union representatives leave his office.

Two days later, upon arriving at the office in the morning, Herbert is astonished to find that the workers have gone on a strike.

Business Plan Meeting

Bernard Schmidt, a German expat, is the newly appointed Country Manager of an Indian subsidiary of a German pharmaceutical company. He is under tremendous pressure from headquarters to show strong results. He schedules a meeting with the Director of Sales & Marketing, Deepak Anand, to discuss next year's Business Plan.

Bernard is impatient and irritated when Deepak Anand arrives 15 minutes late for the meeting. Instead of apologizing for the delay, Deepak greets him with a broad differential smile, and casually mentions that he had to drop off his wife on the way to work. Bernard becomes more uncomfortable when, instead of starting to discuss the plan, Deepak starts asking personal questions such as whether he finds his accommodations comfortable, whether his family has tried Indian food, and whether he has adjusted to the Indian climate.

For Bernard, time is money during business hours, so he interrupts Deepak to suggest continuing the private chat later. When Bernard tells him to start discussing the Annual Plan, Deepak looks puzzled. Bernard points out they have already lost much time, since he was late. Deepak looks somewhat flustered and hurt, and mumbles something about getting delayed "by only 10-15 minutes".

Deepak recovers his composure and begins his presentation. He describes the sales and marketing organization and then elaborates on the different market segments, personal profiles of each regional sales and marketing manager, details of previous product launches, etc. Bernard finds Deepak's lack of focus exasperating and many of these details unnecessary and redundant. After about 20 minutes, Bernard asks Deepak to move to the annual plan of his department.

When Deepak presents estimates of brand and region-wise annual selling costs and revenue targets, Bernard interrupts him and asks how he arrived at these figures. Deepak explains that his estimates are based on past market growth trends, but if Bernard would like, he can revise them.

Though Bernard is not satisfied with this explanation, he asks Deepak to detail his action plans to achieve these targets. Deepak, looking uncertain, explains that he has already briefed his regional managers, and that if Bernard approves the plan, he will work out the other details and ensure the achievement of the targets. Despite Bernard's repeated questioning, Deepak is unable to give a list of specific action steps and a corresponding schedule to achieve his plans.

The meeting ends without a satisfactory conclusion or commitment. Bernard feels it was basically a waste of time. He is disappointed, but also notice that Deepak seems perplexed and dejected. Deepak offers to make a detailed presentation in a week's time.

Construction Project

Takeshi Abe is the leader of a design team of Japanese engineering consultants working with an Indian project team to commission a construction project. His team is facing problems with the Indian team. To resolve these problems, he requests an appointment with the Indian general manager, K. Ramachandran, who is supervising the overall project.

Takeshi tells him that the Indians do not adhere to the established processes but work in an unsystematic way. They usually ignore his team members' requests to document their activities. Takeshi has attempted to initiate a system of daily meetings between the two teams to improve communication, but the Indians seem disinclined to attend these meetings and often do not show up.

Although the project is within the time estimates, Takeshi is concerned that it lags behind on cost and quality parameters that have long-term implications for the project. He politely asks Ramachandran if there is anything he can do to remedy the situation.

The general manager assures Takeshi that he will help sort out the problem, and fixes a meeting for the next day with Takeshi and the Indian project manager, Ashok Patel. Takeshi feels reassured that the general manager will help smooth the relations between the two groups.

The next day, Ashok arrives 10 minutes late to the meeting, and explains that he was unavoidably delayed. The general manager starts the meeting by asking both Takeshi and Ashok to update him on the progress of the project.

Ashok says that the project is moving according to schedule, though his team faces some problems with the Japanese design team. He complains that Takeshi and his team are too theoretical and system-bound in their approach. He says that they insist on following work systems that are too detailed, unnecessary, and time-consuming. To avoid wasting time, his team members often prefer to work out their own solutions, rather than to rely on the ones suggested by the Japanese team. He also complains that the Japanese team insists on too many meetings, even for trivial matters.

Takeshi listens to these complaints intently and does his best to hide his embarrassment and anger by maintaining a pleasant facial expression. He is shocked that his Indian colleague complains about his efforts so directly, and finds it disrespectful and humiliating. Ashok's behavior adds insult to injury, making teamwork, from his perspective, even more strained than before.

Takeshi, of course, does not share his chagrin about poor teamwork directly with his Indian counterpart. He simply says: "We need to think about these problems some more."

Last-Minute Proposal Changes

A plan has been developed to educate Egyptian nurses on the importance of immunizations, including proper procedures and standard immunization schedules. These nurses will then be responsible for going into rural communities and train others.

Several discussions have taken place between the US American Project Coordinators from the organization considering funding this project, and Egyptian government representatives from the Ministry of Health, including field experts (physicians, researchers), and senior government officials. They have already defined the scope of the project, including potential benefits, costs, and the roles of the people involved (funding recipients and program implementers).

All project planners and government officials are present at a meeting. Their goal is to finalize the plan and sign off on the deal. The plan has already been extensively discussed and the funding agency has clearly laid out their requirements for funding the project.

Just before signing the agreement, Tarek Elfar, the Assistant to the Egyptian Health Minister, reads aloud the key points of the implementation plan. At this point, several project participants from the US American group notice that the Egyptians have made changes that have affected some of the key funding requirements.

Susan McMurphy (from the US contingent) immediately points out that these changes are not acceptable, particularly since all the elements of the project had already been extensively discussed and agreed upon.

Mr. Youssef, the Egyptian Health Minister, stands up and states that unless the project is approved as currently written, it will be impossible to implement. He explains the reasons why his team of experts made the last-minute changes to the final proposal, and expresses his hope that the US team can bend a little on their requirements in order to make the program more successful.

Richard Coffman, the lead Project Coordinator from the US, responds that funding for the project was approved based on the proposal as previously written following the guideline framework, and that changes at this time would not be considered.

Mr. Youssef is disappointed and ends the meeting. It appears that after all the work they have invested, the project may not take place.

The Big Change

A large US American company bought a small software company in Israel. The Israeli company was left intact as the R&D department within the new division. Seventy Israeli software developers continued to put in long hours working on products. Headquarters, marketing, and sales were established in New York with the goal of adapting the Israeli products to the US market. A US CEO was installed. He began shuttling between headquarters and Israel.

After three months of study and observation, the CEO arrived in Israel to present his business plan for the new division. He met with the Israeli management team. The new plan called for reorganization within the Israeli subsidiary. The Israeli teams would be dismantled and new, product-focused teams formed. The workforce would remain Israeli.

The CEO let it be known that he was extremely proud that his plan enabled all employees to retain their jobs. This was important given the harsh economic reality in Israel. He then directed the management team to implement the plan. Silence fell over the room when the CEO finished his presentation. He left an hour later for a meeting in Europe.

When he returned to the US, the CEO was surprised to hear what had been going on in the Israeli subsidiary. A senior software developer had resigned and others were threatening to resign if the changes were implemented. Angry e-mails from the teams that were about to be dismantled blamed the CEO for not staying to defend his decisions and for trying to ruin the company. The Israeli management team was working around the clock to persuade the

USA values

Time

US Americans feel they need to "manage" their time, both at work and in their personal lives. Saving time and being productive are critically important because time is literally equated with money.

It is common to hear US people speak of time as managed, saved, spent, bartered, squandered, wasted, lost, found, and invested. Taking action quickly and at the right time, usually as soon as possible, is critical.

Activities are organized in an orderly sequence, one after the other, even when simultaneously engineering a project. What is done now is seen as an investment in the future; precise planning reduces the risk of lost time and prevents failure.

Good service is immediate service. The pressure to do more in less time, with fewer human resources and more technology, creates conflicts even with the linear view of time.

More and more, people value the ability to "multitask": to do several things at the same time. Concern about "fitting everything in" frequently leads people to schedule not only their work time, but their personal time, their relationships, relaxation time, and even their holidays.

At international conferences and seminars with US facilitators, so-called "icebreaker exercises" are commonly used to open the program and get people to meet and interact with others. Such exercises generally employ some kind of randomizing strategy or scorecard to encourage participants to mingle and talk with one another for a moment or two, to learn their names and something about them as individuals outside their job.

Usually there is a strict time limit for this process and sometimes prizes are offered to the people who have met the most people in the short time frame. It doesn't matter if the encounters are meaningful; speed, efficiency, quantity and "getting things rolling" are what count. Such an exercise does not take into account that in many cultures, people would prefer to "melt" rather than "break" the ice.

Many US Americans work with one eye on the clock. A short-term orientation, quarterly budgeting and planning are common. People identify tasks, set milestones, and follow a strict schedule. They tend to work toward their goals in a linear fashion and can be uncomfortable with interruptions.

Because of extensive scheduling and long working hours, it can be difficult to find time to form connections with co-workers. People's lives are managed minute-by-minute, and meetings are scheduled far in advance in consideration of others' time. Depending on the situation, it can be hard to make even a personal appointment on short notice.

Punctuality is important. While five- to ten-minute delays for work meetings are tolerable, they often cause irritation. With frequent meetings scheduled back-to-back, many complain when a lack of punctuality delays meetings.

Now, with high-tech tools, people are multitasking more than ever. It is said that attention is the commodity hardest to find, get, and keep in the US today.

Possible Negative Perception: Mechanistic, impersonal

People from many other parts of the world may feel that US Americans are impersonal, mechanical—always in a hurry—and have a short attention span.

They seem not to have time for other people and their needs, and miss the true enjoyment of life. Interruptions and unexpected visits in work and personal life may not be welcome.

Examples:

To outsiders, US Americans may seem always in a hurry and to lack quality time to build relationships. Multiple online social networks may replace face-to-face relationships.

They tend to do things "by the book" and have little time for spontaneity. Except for very close friends, one generally needs an invitation or to schedule a visit, rather than just "dropping by."

Many US businesses consider that being first to market and gaining market share are critical to survival and success in both the domestic and global markets.

It is up to you/self reliance

US Americans tend to believe that one survives and succeeds as an individual. An individual can, and should, create and re-create his or her own identity by the choices he or she makes. Self-reliance and personal initiative, it is believed, bring

about “the greatest good for the greatest number.” One has to take risks to succeed: “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

US Americans may move frequently during their lives, separating themselves from family, friends, and home to attend school, accept or seek employment, or explore new opportunities.

US Americans believe that success should be based on one’s own performance, not due to one’s family, school affiliation, place of origin, or influential connections. Ideally, one is judged by what one does rather than for who one is. This individual focus may result in a high degree of competitiveness compared with some other cultures, with stress on being a “winner” and not a “loser.”

US people tend to take care of themselves and expect others to do the same. In the US view, if you want something, you take it upon yourself to find out about it, ask for it, or get it.

US film and TV-show heroes are usually ordinary individuals who save the day or the world by acting on their own, sometimes bypassing rules and authorities and ignoring group opinion.

US Americans tend to value privacy and personal space. Even when doors are open, people ask before coming in. They don’t answer other people’s phones or use other people’s computers at work without asking.

While friendly and helpful, US people expect that individuals will make their own decisions and do their own jobs. Self-help books, groups, and do-it-yourself projects abound. Individuals, rather than groups or teams, are most often rewarded.

Most US Americans believe each person is special and unique. Benefit packages at work may be “menus.” An individual is given a certain amount to spend, according to his or her needs, with vendors of healthcare, childcare, eldercare, and continuing education services.

While protective of their children, some US parents treat them like small adults. They ask children to make their own decisions as soon as they learn to speak. Children may move away from home after secondary school. Many children have their own phone, computer, TV set, and automobile at the earliest possible age. In difficult economic times, jobless children who return to the familial nest can be both welcomed as family but also, at least unconsciously, be seen as “mooching,” i.e., taking advantage of family resources where they should be succeeding on their own.

It is not uncommon to have different “friends” during certain parts of one’s life, or different groups of friends for different activities, rather than “overall” friendships. US Americans do not always consult authority for wisdom. Individuals often take credit for accomplishments, which may weaken team spirit. Because individual initiative and accomplishment are so highly prized, fame, notoriety and celebrity are signs of success. Many are torn between the desire for privacy and celebrity and publicizing their lives and deeds in the media, on You Tube and via social networking sites.

Since the US has a limited public social services net, individuals are expected to provide for themselves throughout life. For many, there is a lingering fear that there will not be sufficient resources later in life.

US Americans have low levels of social welfare, health care for the poor, and public services; many strongly resist doing for others what they believe they should be doing for themselves. Self-help groups of all kinds perform services that in other cultures may be performed by family or community services.

The late Robert Kohls observed that US English is filled with “composite words that have the word “self” as a prefix: self-aware, self-confident, self-conscious, self-control, self-criticism, self-deception, self-defeating, self-denial.”

Volunteerism for a good cause is common but appears to be declining. It is generally seen as a free individual choice, not as a social requirement.

Possible Negative Perception: Self-centered, competitive

Because they work hard at individual, personal success, others may see US Americans as self-centered and demanding.

They may talk too loudly and too much about themselves, and seem to boast continuously about what they do.

The emphasis on the individual may challenge their ability to collaborate in some work situations.

Examples:

Outsiders may view US Americans as too busy taking care of themselves to have time for quality relationships, selfish, and self-centered. Individuals often take credit for accomplishments, which may weaken team spirit.

In the United States, a friendly demeanor may be a social politeness rather than a sign of actual friendship. Many US Americans consider friendliness and smiling as essential for getting along with people.

While some might view this as a US way of saving or giving face to others and avoiding conflict, these actions may easily be interpreted as signs of insincerity.

Take charge/control

US Americans generally believe that they are masters of their destiny; they must take individual action to succeed. To be "in control" of one's life means to manage it in a way that brings success to the individual. The belief that one should be able to control things extends to nature, natural resources, and even time.

US Americans like systems and products that enable them to do things on their own: "empowerment" is a popular term among US managers. Progress tends to be viewed as linear and upward. Successful careers should mean steady promotions and pay raises. A company should always be growing, the economy always expanding.

Research and technology are carried out in the belief that everything from atomic particles to the universe could benefit human enterprise. A problem should not be something left to fate or chance to sort out—it is an opportunity to be welcomed with optimism and resolved with ingenuity, hard work, and technology. Fatalism is seen as superstition, pessimism, or laziness.

Many US Americans feel they can control their life and career. They use time-management tools ranging from iPod agendas to wallets for grocery coupons. They tend to be task-focused and achievement-oriented, and feel that if you don't anticipate and plan for every contingency, you may have difficulty getting everything done.

There are gadgets "to make life easier" as US Americans try to control the world around them. There is a thriving industry in organic foods and products, and health, safety, and hygiene products.

US Americans may blame themselves for life's misfortunes, and some, for their own ill health. They may feel they should have been able to control their own life's circumstances better.

Possible Negative Perception: Impatient, unrealistic, unilateral

The urgency US Americans feel toward taking charge and making things right often leads others to see them as obsessed with doing it alone, and in their own way. The desire to get things done may be seen as being unrealistic, demanding instant solutions, lacking patience, and failing to collaborate.

Examples:

When outsiders look at the USA they often observe people with high blood pressure and stress resulting from compulsive "Type A" behavior and "workaholism." Stress-related disorders are higher than in some other cultures. US Americans may be frustrated when things are not accomplished immediately and in the manner they think is best. Some

US Americans feel a moral obligation to rescue "the less fortunate" of the world, which may cause them to take unilateral action, political, military, social or moral if others don't agree or agree quick enough with them.

Level the playing field/equal opportunity

The US American sense of equality is seen in everyday behavior. People tend to be open, informal, and friendly. People expect to be treated fairly and professionally regardless of their background. Politicians and business executives emphasize their humble origins to demonstrate that they still maintain the values of "everyday" people. While social and economic equality are ongoing struggles of US democracy, its history is full of individuals and groups who have struggled to achieve equal rights in society.

Though there is a large gap between rich and poor in the US, many people still believe that equal opportunity, ingenuity, and hard work are the best ways to guarantee a classless democracy. Laws and policies are directed at making it possible for everyone to have a fair chance to compete, but success in the end still depends on the individual's efforts. US laws enforce fair hiring and promotion practices, and organizations operating in the US are required to observe them.

Equal opportunity. Treat everyone fairly regardless of gender, race, or religion. Rights and freedoms are highly cherished in the US. Privilege, in theory at least, is generally seen as belonging to everyone or to no one in the democracy—and no one deserves special treatment.

The struggle to achieve and maintain equality in society is ongoing. Laws are enacted to protect targeted groups from discrimination and harassment. Diversity and inclusion initiatives are commonly mandated in organizations. Diversity legislation applies to US company installations and to personnel abroad.

The value of equality also is expressed in US interactions, which are generally informal and often on a first-name basis even at high-level meetings and public events. US officials may address top-level foreign dignitaries using their given names, which may seem brash or rude to those outside the US. Titles are written on business cards, but these titles are rarely used on an everyday basis.

There is random seating at meetings, and when queuing, everyone stands in line and waits a turn regardless of rank. "Self-service" is common. Everyone gets his or her own coffee or drink, though some may ask politely, "May I get something for you?"

There is a tendency to dress casually for work, though some professions have dress codes for safety and for certain functions. Women often pay for themselves at business meals, and sometimes on dates.

While some US managers like to give orders, most generally ask for volunteers or ask individuals if they will do a task. Job descriptions are important, and employees are regularly evaluated based on how well he or she meets those standards. In some situations, employees may be asked to evaluate the performance of other employees or their superiors.

Possible Negative Perception: Disrespectful, hypocritical

Since US Americans value treating people as equals and informality is the norm, others may see them as brash, rude, and lacking in respect.

Wisdom is frequently not shared and elders may hesitate to intervene with the value their experience could add.

Examples:

Informality in speech and dress may be seen as lack of decorum and politeness, or a lack of respect for elders and authority. The distinction between familiar and formal speech has almost fully disappeared in English, particularly as spoken by US Americans. This supports the egalitarian behavior pattern.

Some children address their parents or teachers by their given names. Economic class distinctions are real but frequently denied or ignored.

The idea of the United States as a place of endless opportunity has drawn adventurers, immigrants, refugees, and entrepreneurs from around the globe. The "American Dream" of personal success and abundance—such things as owning one's home, automobile, and other material possessions that give comfort and status—drive daily life and career choices for many.

Stimulated by continual advertising and goaded by the fear of "not making it," people may work more than one job to succeed. Many shops, restaurants and grocery stores are open for business seven days a week, 24 hours a day. And due to globalization and technology, Americans are often "logging on" after hours and working longer. In prosperous times, going into business, shopping, and spending money are seen as virtuous and even patriotic activities because they support the economy and the national purpose. The sanctity of private property is shown in resistance to increased taxation, and the reluctance to provide as many public services as some other industrialized nations.

Many US Americans fear "socialism," which they see as taking money and property away from those who rightfully earn it and giving it to people who do not deserve it. On the other hand, they encourage philanthropy, generous gifts of money and resources and volunteerism to institutions and causes they believe to be worthy.

Think and Grow Rich.

The US has long led the world in economic and consumer prowess. Underlying this success is a system of free enterprise that invites its citizens to think, act, and speak in business terms. This system has also attracted many of the world's best and brightest individuals and organizations to market their products or set up affiliates and new businesses in the USA. Often, learning centers, cafeterias, and facilities management are profit centers in corporations—they need to make money or their functions may be outsourced or eliminated.

Economic crises, no matter how severe, are seen as "corrections" to this system. Other countries want to learn to benefit from how the US encourages creativity and innovation. US management theories and tools are often the basis of international business practices. The term "venture capital" is used in its US English form in other languages. Even non-business activities are evaluated in terms of ROI (whether one's investment is money, time or effort) and marketability. Individuals are encouraged to develop their "personal brand."

Successful people show ambition and initiative. They work hard, take risks and are quick to seize opportunities. Status symbols in the form of homes, cars, and conspicuous consumption are accepted. Failure is acceptable, but not passivity. Bankruptcy is a legal process, not a cause for guilt and shame. "Moonlighting," holding more than one job or having a business on the side of one's "day job," is common.

Giving of one's time and property to the less fortunate is seen as an individual, voluntary, and moral choice. Corporations may try to market themselves as "good citizens" by giving generously and visibly to good causes. Organizations may encourage employees to donate their time, talent, and money to charities and social services.

Possible Negative Perception: Materialistic, greedy, unprincipled

Because many US Americans seem driven by the need to succeed, to possess and enjoy the symbols of success, others often accuse them of greed and consumerism. It may seem like possessions are more important than people.

Examples:

US Americans may appear to be slaves to money, working too much, and lacking a balanced life. They may seem to never slow down—even vacations are shorter than in many other countries. Work/life balance and the preserving the

quality of the environment are perennial themes in US thinking, but how to achieve these goals is vigorously debated. In the past, many US businesses defined a free market as having no responsibility to the environment or to society, only to shareholders. This, however, is being debated in recent years in the face of financial and ecological disasters.

Play by the rule/ law and order

Based on the idea of equality, US Americans believe it is important to create rules and laws to provide protection for all citizens. A basic tenant of the democracy is "equal protection under the law." Given the diversity that exists within the USA, rules clarify acceptable behavior. Many US people don't feel comfortable unless they are acting within the law, following rules and guidelines. Yet they may feel entitled to look for, and utilize, legal "loopholes" that are to their advantage.

Lawyers often play an important part in business negotiations. Signed, legal contracts document agreements, and it is expected that they will be followed exactly. Although relatively expensive for the average person, US Americans may consult with lawyers when they feel mistreated by other family members, neighbors, schools, churches, or businesses. As a result of various lawsuits, there are lengthy disclaimers of legal responsibility on products, books, and even on some e-mails. No one is above the law.

Because of severe, often legal consequences, many US individuals take a "safety first" approach to their work and decisions. That is, they make sure they can document, explain, and defend whatever they say or do in a straightforward linear, clear fashion. Extensively documented meetings, decisions, and even individual activity logs are used as a hedge against being called into question by one's superiors or by legal investigation.

Depending on the situation, personal behavior and speech in the workplace can be highly regulated. Oftentimes, developing intimate relationships with colleagues outside the workplace is discouraged or forbidden. Most people follow correct procedures to avoid conflict and litigation.

When one's serious errors, mistakes, or moral failings cannot be hidden, public confession with a request for forgiveness may be offered, particularly by high-ranking individuals or celebrities. The high price of litigation often causes parties to settle outside of court (pay off the aggrieved party) rather than risk the loss of reputation and the cost of a long trial.

Warrantees, advertising pieces, product packaging, self-help books and even e-mails include lengthy disclaimers that deny responsibility for misuse of products or information. Penalty clauses abound in buyer-vendor contracts. The corporate legal department proofs all business agreements or contracts, and may even review training manuals and needs assessments.

Possible Negative Perception: Rigid, self-righteous, inhumane

The desire for structured law and order may lead others to see US Americans as lacking good moral sense, fearful, and defensive. They see the US as plagued by too many lawyers and too many lawsuits, resulting in rigid and inflexible attitudes.

Some US Americans feel it is acceptable to bend or break the law if they think a higher principle is at stake, or "take justice into their own hands" if they feel that the legal system is not working for them.

This legalistic mentality can lead to dichotomous thinking—things are right or wrong, true or false. People are either "for us or against us," good or bad, with few shades of gray.

Under stress this leads to suppression of debate with a tendency to listen to or expose oneself only to information that supports one's position.

Examples:

US Americans may be seen as lacking flexibility, having limited awareness of context, and requiring the overuse of warnings. To outsiders, it may seem that lawyers are used when a personal approach might be more effective.

The US has largest per capita number of prisoners and most extensive criminal prison system in the world, including a death penalty. Human rights abuses are tolerated for national security. Fear of rampant lawsuits.

Tell it like it is/speak up

US people believe in "freedom of speech"—it is important to speak up to be heard by others, to express your opinion. People are encouraged to voice their ideas, concerns, or disagreements in the classroom and the workplace. This means being honest, straightforward, and explicit: "laying one's cards on the table." Coming directly to the point and communicating in a linear style is considered preferable.

US Americans may speak with more volume than people of some other cultures, but it is important that communication not be flowery or emotional. Emotional outbursts, particularly those of anger, cause one to lose credibility in workplace contexts, and social acceptance outside the workplace.

Communication is expected to be friendly, positive, constructive, and motivational. Hence, much effort goes into the quality and style of presentations and proposals. US Americans often speak in superlatives and are direct, enthusiastic, and positive.

US Americans are used to introducing themselves to others, and give and expect to get a firm and energetic handshake. Though they may start with a bit of impersonal small talk about sports or the weather, they get to business almost immediately.

Expressing oneself with directness is seen as honest and one shows respect by treating others as equals. It is expected that this directness will be reciprocated. Conflict is seen as opportunity as long as it is dealt with openly and rationally. In business and work situations, hesitancy may be interpreted as "hiding something" or as insincerity.

US Americans tend to do what they say or what they agree to do, once they agree verbally. However, once a commitment is made, they rely on written documents and records rather than verbal commitments.

There is a tendency to communicate impersonally, even with the person at the next desk, by using voice mail, texting, email and written notes instead of face-to-face and real-time interactions or direct phone calls. This is seen to be swift, practical, and can provide a documented "paper trail."

US Americans generally expect others to understand and speak English. Touching, beyond the handshake, is minimal with most conversations conducted at arm's length. They tend to be animated, outgoing, use facial expressions, and considerable eye contact. They are uncomfortable with silences in conversations. US Americans tend to speak loudly to show enthusiasm, and prefer to be positive and optimistic, feeling that this avoids needless confrontation and gets the best results in both work and life.

COLOMBIA - values

The word "no" is generally not used in meetings and social events because it could hurt relationships.

In a business context, answers such as “the committee is analyzing it,” “call tomorrow,” or “people are very busy” really mean “no.”

Relationships are key. Colombians will generally invest time in getting to know you and understand you. They place a high value on friendship, and are courteous and hospitable.

Colombians value the art of conversation and friendliness. It is difficult to develop a business relationship without first having a friendship or relationship.

Indirect communication is valued and confrontation is avoided.

Tradition

People spend their professional lives simply accepting fate, instead of actively making a change in their destiny. Colombians tend to live and work in the same place for a long time. They like stability and dislike change.

It can be difficult to introduce innovation into companies. People tend to simply accept things as they are and do not welcome new ideas. There are many laws that don't make change easy. Religion and religious traditions are also very important. Colombians like to have things for a long period of time; relationships are consolidated and enriched over time.

Colombians have been influenced strongly by historical processes that have impacted their development and customs. The custom is to follow rules, follow procedures, and take care of relationships. The belief is that if the old ways work, there is no need for change. As a result of this, procedures, friends, and stability are appreciated.

Foreigners may experience difficulty making quick connections. Colombians tend to trust people after they have shared time and experiences together. Once you are a friend, they will try to help you.

Possible Negative Perception: Resistance to change, few innovations.

Outsiders may find the resistance to change confusing, and wonder why Colombians do not actively seek new and better ways of doing things.

Examples:

To outsiders, it may seem that Colombians do not actively work to change their path in life and/or to achieve their goals.

Personal opinion

The art of conversation is an intrinsic value of Colombian culture. Colombians generally enjoy discussion among those of equal rank and view it positively, whether it is for fun or as an intellectual challenge. This is part of the Colombian identity and expressed as part of their authentic personality.

Thanks to this, many discussions are generated and many points of view are debated. Conclusions are reached when one person's opinion is accepted by others.

However, when speaking with a superior or an authority figure, it is different. In that case, one should not express opinions for fear of disapproval. Although Colombians tend to be very collectivist with families, close groups and friends, they can be very individualistic in groups because each person wants to express an opinion. The worth of personal, individual ideas is often valued over collectivistic achievements. Emphasis is put on the dignity of life and the value of the individual.

Possible Negative Perception: Ego-centric, individualistic

A tendency for people of the same rank to actively discuss topics can help them to get to know each other better. Yet, such roundabout or back-and-forth communication may cause delays in decision making.

Examples:

Outsiders witness much detailed discussion about each decision, with each person expressing an opinion, but rarely any consensus. Colombians may have a hard time accomplishing things in a group. People tend to be more focused on themselves than on the group, and therefore, Colombians may have slow team performance.

Social Status:

Socio-cultural and economic positions are clearly marked and valued, and people tend to interact with their peers. Establishing friendships with those of similar social status is facilitated because both parties have similar educational backgrounds so they can understand each other easily. Throughout society, it is important to be respectful toward the elderly.

Social status is important, maintained throughout one's life, and generally determines one's professional future. Socio-cultural and economic positions are clearly marked and valued, and people tend to interact with their peers. Establishing friendships with those of similar social status is facilitated because both parties have similar educational backgrounds so they can understand each other easily.

Throughout society, it is important to be respectful toward the elderly.

Colombia is a stratified country in which social position is determined by birth. Generally, the lower classes hold jobs such as maid and watchman, while the upper classes are the intellectuals. Socio-cultural and economic positions are clearly marked and valued, and determine one's place in society and how people behave. It tends to be very difficult for people in different social strata to interact with equal levels of respect for one another.

Possible Negative Perception: Unfair, repressive.

People have different opportunities due to the social structure, and the opportunities for advancement presented to them vary tremendously.

Examples:

Social inequality means the best possibilities are available only for wealthy people, while the vulnerable lower classes struggle. It is not common to value talent over social status.

Work to Live

Sharing time with family, friends and relatives is usually essential within the Colombian culture. This is why Sundays in Colombia are generally reserved exclusively for family activities and healthy recreation.

It is said that Colombia has a Carnival every day of the year. Foreigners must take this into account because it is an important part of the Colombian culture.

"The American Dream is to work day and night; that's why they are always dreaming and it is called 'the American dream.'"

This is a Colombian joke about their perception that US Americans only think about work.

Work is an auxiliary to life, not the main objective; leisure is also important. Success is found not so much in what you have, as in who you are.

Women, beauty, and intellectual brilliance must be acknowledged in the proper way.

In Colombia, there are on average 20 holidays a year when work activities are not performed in the majority of companies. These celebrations for workers are activities that strengthen relationships and are an essential component of the working environment.

Possible Negative Perception: Not serious, little future planning.

Outsiders have the tendency to believe that Colombians are not serious people because they tend to devote so much of their lives to "unproductive" activities.

Examples:

Since Colombians are not 100% dedicated to business, often they are not focused exclusively on the task.

What is normal casual, joking, talking, and acknowledging beautiful women in the workplace could be seen by outsiders as sexual harassment or simply as wasting time.

Time is your friend:

Time is plentiful and not a limited resource to be managed. Schedules in Colombia have a great deal of flexibility.

Several topics can be talked about during a business meeting, and sometimes topics include things completely unrelated to the main agenda items. Handling several conversations at the same time, talking on a cell phone, or asking the secretary for coffee during meetings is common.

Time is to enjoy, and friends should share time together on special occasions. Schedules are flexible, and the present moment is the most important. Since time is abundant, there is no need to hurry—things will work out—there is plenty of time.

Possible Negative Perception: Distracted, unfocused, late.

Colombians are not conscious about the importance of time to people in other cultures. Schedules don't work here as they do in many other parts of the world, which can be very frustrating to outsiders.

Examples:

Colombians may seem unfocused in meetings, or may seem distracted in conversations, because they may handle many conversations at the same time. It may appear to outsiders that everyone is busy trying to interrupt everybody else.

GERMANY - values

Sense of Order:

A focus on structure, systems, planning, and schedules is prevalent in most sectors of society, including personal and work life. Rules and regulations create order and structure and are generally accepted in public and personal spheres. There tends to be a "right" way to do things and a "wrong" way.

Germans often start out with a "big picture" view and proceed to identifying smaller steps and more detailed timelines. This "inner logic" is seen as an effective way to get an overview first, ensuring that nothing is forgotten or overlooked later. A sense of order is seen as a means to achieving efficiency. It also guarantees a certain amount of predictability and stability, thereby creating a feeling of safety, while reducing the propensity to take risks.

The sense of order prevalent in German society is also reflected in how Germans view time and punctuality. The concept of time shared by most Germans is fairly rigid and their workday is tightly structured. Punctuality is of utmost importance. Meetings are expected to begin and end on time. For many people, being "on time" means arriving five

minutes early. Projects are run based on milestones and deadlines. Deadlines are usually upheld, and missing a deadline is seen as a lack of professionalism.

Meetings usually have an agenda, including prioritized agenda items. It is very important to document meetings properly in the form of detailed meeting minutes (Protokoll), which are distributed after the meeting. These are often referred back to for clarification of questions and ensuring that desired outcomes have been met.

When team members realize that they are unable to meet an agreed upon deadline, it is expected that they will proactively inform their colleagues about the delay, providing an explanation so that expectations can be adjusted. It's best to do this as soon as it becomes clear that the impending deadline cannot be met and not wait until it has arrived.

When something unexpected comes up and someone cannot keep their commitment resulting in a change of plans, most Germans tend to have little patience and might consider their counterpart as unreliable.

People who don't maintain orderliness in their lives, people who are "messy," are often seen as unprofessional—or, they are viewed as people who don't get much done or don't achieve much. This view is based on the perception that someone who is unable to keep their desk tidy and organized will be equally unable to set priorities and organize their life efficiently. This person will often be seen as inefficient and wasting their own and their colleagues' time.

A sense of order saves time, provides a useful overview of things and situations, and structures work processes efficiently. In the German mind, when an employee works on a project in a consecutive, step-by-step way, the chances of forgetting or overlooking something are kept to a minimum. A strong sense of order is also closely related to a focus on quality and thoroughness.

Training and development are regarded as a top priority by most German organizations, and money and effort are invested to make sure training is done "right." This includes providing the proper equipment and learning tools such as large pin boards and multitudes of differently colored and shaped paper to facilitate a structured way of brainstorming and discussing ideas. Literally, every German office has a version of this type of technology called Metaplan.

Germans tend to use many different types of electronic and paper day-timers and calendars to structure their time and keep "To Do" lists. Clocks can be found everywhere inside and outside the home and office. Children's book bags are equipped with many extra pockets to help them better organize their books and school supplies.

Most roads in German cities are equipped with clearly marked bike lanes running alongside the sidewalks. Bike lanes and sidewalks are separated from each other either by a line or by differently colored pavers signaling to pedestrians and motorists that these bike lanes are "off limits" to them. Foreign visitors to Germany are often surprised by how disciplined and orderly Germans tend to be regarding "staying in their lanes."

On almost every seat in any Germany high-speed train, one can find a detailed schedule listing all connecting trains within 20 minutes from every train station the train passes through. Most Germans love to consult their Zugbegleiter (train companion) frequently when they travel by high-speed train. The German railway provides a service where travellers will receive a "delay alarm" on their cell phones if a train is more than five minutes late.

Possible Negative Perception: Rigid, inflexible

Because Germans tend to focus on structure, planning, and order, it might seem to outsiders that at times there is an over-emphasis on the process of getting a task accomplished the "right way" instead of just getting the job done. Also, the insistence on timeliness can leave little room for spontaneity or creativity.

Examples:

Starting a company in Germany, even a small independent consulting firm or a small retail business, requires a lot of time, paperwork, and patience—there are no "shortcuts." An entrepreneur must apply for different permits at different offices, which makes starting a company or a new venture challenging and time-consuming—and keeps foreign investment away at times.

Depending on the size and organizational culture of a company, there may be little flexibility regarding an “urgent” task when the person whose job it is to complete the task is out of the office. It’s common to hear a colleague say, “That’s not my job” or “So-and-so is on vacation, you have to wait.” This is especially aggravating for people coming from cultures with a different mindset around customer service.

Thoroughness:

Diligence, meticulousness, and depth in doing things are important. The completion of tasks and processes, from beginning to end, is based on a comprehensive analysis of all facts and data that are part of the process and/or task.

Products and services are expected to meet the highest quality standards, which takes time and effort. One also maintains high quality standards in one’s individual performance. Taking time to ensure a high-quality outcome is preferred over getting a task completed or a product made with the potential cost of compromised quality.

Most German workers, especially engineers, take great pride in their craftsmanship and the high quality standards of their products. “Quality made in Germany” is taken very seriously. If German products leave the factory with the label “Made in Germany,” employees want to be sure the products meet the highest quality standards possible, to be competitive in the global market.

Germans generally don’t believe in the 80/20 rule (i.e., having 80% of a goal achieved is good enough, as it would take a disproportionately high amount of effort and time to complete the final 20%). They would rather have at least 90 or 95% of a task accomplished before calling it finished. 100% is ideal, of course. This can result in the last 5% taking up to 50% of the entire planning horizon for the project or task.

When consultants and trainers submit client proposals for human resource development projects, the client expects these to contain detailed information. The proposal must include a meticulous description of the approach to be used based on a thorough needs assessment, as well as an in-depth analysis of the project background and context, reasoning for each step that will be taken, and examples of how the situation was managed in similar projects in the past, thereby proving the consultants’ expertise and experience. These proposals can easily be 10 to 15 pages in length.

In medieval times, tradespeople who intended to settle down as member of a local guild in Germany had to do a three-year “walkabout,” practicing their craft before they were allowed to return home. Even today, each tradesperson has to register with their local chamber of commerce, which regulates and supervises all trades in numerous ways. In order to become a “master” tradesperson, one has to spend a lot of time, money, and effort to prepare for the theoretical and practical exams while working full-time.

Employees who start working on a project without having a step-by-step plan for how they are going to proceed are often viewed as “superficial.” By German standards, this is considered equivalent to unprofessional, inexperienced, and potentially dangerous.

However, as more and more German companies are entering the global market and transitioning from a traditional family-owned structure to publicly held corporations focused on “shareholder value,” German workers are increasingly facing internal values conflicts. The pressure to succeed in a competitive global market creates high expectations to produce more in a shorter period of time. This can run contrary to the values of thoroughness and quality.

Possible Negative Perception: Perfectionist, inefficient

Because Germans tend to want to do things as thoroughly as possible, outsiders may feel that German performance standards are excessively high, and that they lose sight of what’s actually possible—or needed—in a certain amount of time. Too much detail orientation resulting in “over-engineering” of certain products or services may be seen as a lack of decision-making ability (“analysis paralysis”) or business acumen by others.

Examples of perfectly designed but over-engineered products are abundant, such as the cell phone developed by Siemens a few years ago. The phone was so complicated in set-up and features that customers who did not have the patience to go through the learning process gave up and returned the phone.

Examples:

A German machine tool manufacturer gets a call from an irate client whose equipment has broken down in the middle of a long production run. Rather than immediately sending a customer service representative to fix the machine, the German engineering department does a thorough analysis of the problem via phone or email first. The German engineers say that they need to understand the cause of the problem and all pertinent details before they can start solving the issue. Outsiders often view this approach as inefficient.

Because meetings tend to follow a strict agenda and diversions are looked upon negatively, “out of the box” ideas might get pushed back or flat out rejected—unless they are presented in a certain structured format accepted by Germans, e.g., Metaplan. This is in stark contrast to cultures where behaviors such as “just doing it” or “rolling up one’s sleeves” are seen as proactive or action-oriented and are highly valued.

Rationality:

German work culture tends to be very task-oriented. Tasks are completed and problems solved by gathering all the necessary data and then implementing a carefully thought-out plan or solution. Clear, logical, and rational arguments are preferred to intuitive, emotion-based reasoning.

When members of a team or a department disagree on something or have an open conflict about a process, decision or procedure, most people will attempt to find a solution based on facts, standards, or rules. They will cite “ZDF” (Zahlen, Daten, Fakten, or numbers, data, facts) and will shy away from involving emotions to address the conflict.

Increasingly, the type of task an employee fulfills determines their status within the organization. This is due to the fact that more and more German companies work on a project-basis, and hierarchical cultures have been replaced by flat organizational structures.

The task is at the center of activity—“what matters are the facts” (es geht um die Sache) or “numbers, data, facts” (Zahlen, Daten, Fakten or ZDF). To convince customers or colleagues, one has to apply the “ZDF rule” and provide numbers and data in a clear and concise and format, as well as factual arguments and statistical data.

At work, people tend to want to be “respected” rather than “liked,” focusing more on the accomplishments of a person or on their technical expertise rather than on their personality or other “soft factors.” This means that people don’t tend to build friendships at work; there is a clear separation between work colleagues and friends.

Foreign subsidiaries of German companies often complain about the amount of data reporting they have to do to comply with the reporting requirements from headquarters in Germany. It is very common for facilitators of training programs and workshops to provide participants in their workshops with a “seminar protocol” in e-format, i.e., photographs embedded in PowerPoint slides of all relevant flip chart pages used and produced during the workshop.

German negotiators are generally seen as very tough, mostly focusing on numbers, while not being interested in the relationship-building aspect of the negotiation process.

Possible Negative Perception: Aloof, distant, cold

Because people tend to prefer getting the task done without investing large amounts of time building relationships with their counterparts while doing so, Germans may be perceived as distant, cold und devoid of emotions. A reasoning style based only on facts, figures, logic, and rational arguments may seem one-sided, narrow-minded, or even ineffective to people coming from cultures that take a more holistic approach.

Examples:

Most Germans, especially if they have not travelled abroad much, are unaccustomed to exchanging pleasantries when they first meet someone; engaging in “small talk” is often seen as a waste of time. They prefer to get to the business at hand rather quickly, which can be perceived by outsiders as cold or distant.

Instead of discussing personal topics such as one's family or alma mater to "break the ice," initial conversations between people tend to be brief and focus on impersonal topics such as weather, sports, and current events.

Conflicts tend to get resolved on a factual basis by looking at "neutral data," while emotions or feelings don't get taken into consideration as much. They "don't belong" in the workplace is a commonly heard phrase.

Directness:

Many Germans prefer a direct and explicit style of communication. They tend to say what they mean and mean what they say, leaving very little room for interpretation of the content. The belief is that communication is most effective when no one has to "read between the lines."

Honesty and (perceived) objectivity are of utmost importance, including when it comes to disagreeing with someone or addressing a conflict. The truth should be told "without makeup" (ungeschminkte Wahrheit). Germans are convinced that a conflict can only be solved if it is addressed directly thus "taking the power out of it."

German directness goes hand-in-hand with a rational and matter-of-fact communication style, including in workplace relationships where direct feedback, especially negative feedback, is expected and provided freely. Germans tend to strictly separate the professional from the personal. This tends to keep them from building close relationships with people at work so that they do not feel inhibited in freely expressing their opinions.

Feedback given during performance reviews tends to be direct, listing the areas needing improvement in great detail without "sugar-coating" any problem areas. The manager might not say much at all about the things that the employer has done well other than a curt "quite good." There is a common saying in Swabia, in the southern part of Germany, "If you didn't get scolded, that's enough praise already." Extensive praise is not necessary, and can, in fact, make people suspicious: "Is something wrong? Why are they praising me?"

However, if someone makes a mistake, the mistake and the results of the mistake will be described and analyzed in great detail, and more often than not, blame will be assigned. People tend not to hold back their comments and might even call the mistake "stupid." One usually knows where one stands with Germans as they don't tend to mince words, especially when giving negative feedback. A manager at work might use the word "stupid" or "idiotic" when describing a employee's behavior; most people take such feedback in stride.

Managers and their teams at BASF, Germany's biggest producer of chemicals and related products, go through an annual 360 Feedback process where the results of the feedback are openly shared and discussed with the entire team during a four-hour workshop. During the meeting, team members provide their team leader with direct and explicit feedback on their leadership skills, as well as ways to improve them, if necessary.

The team leader encourages team members to provide constructive feedback and criticism. The ability to do so is considered a vital part of the team member's expertise on the job. People are not shy about asking near strangers how much rent they pay or how much they paid for certain goods or services.

Germans will also reprimand fellow Germans when they think they did something wrong. For instance, when someone takes too much time in line at the supermarket or deciding what type of produce to buy, shop assistants and fellow shoppers alike will quickly express their impatience.

When work teams, especially in the health sector, are mired in conflict and unable to resolve it in constructive ways, they often seek the help of a specially trained external mediator or consultant. The consultant will work with the team to make hidden conflicts transparent so that the team can discuss them openly and directly.

Possible Negative Perception: Rude, harsh, impolite

Especially in a conflict situation or when giving feedback to another person, Germans don't tend to consider the feelings or reactions of their counterparts.

In cultures that are more relationship-oriented, this type of directness can be perceived as impolite and undiplomatic at best, or as rude and harsh at worst. Germans often fail to realize that the actual content of a message (spoken words) is only a small part of what is being communicated.

They are not used to considering non-verbal aspects of communication such as tone of voice, gestures, silences, or who is speaking, when decoding a message, and therefore, might come across as too direct.

Examples: It's very common and completely acceptable to comment directly and openly on the internal or external qualities of people and objects, without much regard to the impact of these comments.

This includes the appearance of someone. For example, "Oh, have you gained weight?" or "You look tired—do you have too much work?" are questions that co-workers might ask each other without thinking them rude. German directness can also be perceived as "black and white thinking" or as a lack of tolerance for ambiguity.

Paying a compliment to a German, for example, about something they are wearing might result in a comment such as, "That's 20 years old" without even thanking the compliment-giver, thus shutting down any further attempt at making polite conversation.

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Expertise:

It is very important to most Germans to acquire a high degree of expertise in one or more skill sets and/or areas of specialty—and to have the paper to show for it.

Germans tend to invest many years and a lot of resources in professional training, and value their degrees, diplomas, and certificates. However, this type of expertise must be proven over and over again and kept up-to-date, resulting in a lifelong-learning orientation.

When people apply for a job but do not have exactly the "right" qualifications on paper, i.e., the required degree or certificate, they most likely will not get an interview even though they might have a great deal of experience in the field. An HR person reviewing an application from such a person might say something like, "What do they want? They're not qualified." Learning by doing is not generally accepted as a substitute for the proper credential.

Contrary to widespread belief and old stereotypes, the "hierarchy" in German work contexts of today—at least in most areas—is determined much more by the expert knowledge of managers and leaders than by their positional power or rank and title. Especially younger German leaders tend to be considered *primus inter pares* (first among equals), rather than the authority figure at the top. This type of leader has to prove their expertise on a daily basis in order to garner the respect of their direct reports, peers, and boss.

On the other hand, people who are qualified on paper, or have been in their positions for a long time, and do not perform well—even over time—are often protected from criticism or bad performance reviews because they have the "right" qualifications.

When people change jobs, it is very important to have a detailed "report card" listing all the projects and types of experiences the employee was involved in on the job. This becomes their "entry ticket" for their next place of employment.

Job applicants have to submit a detailed list of degrees, certificates and other types of proof that shows what kind of study and additional training programs they have completed. Copies of the actual certificates have to be submitted as well.

Germans are very proud of their centuries-old "dual training system" that provides trainees (apprentices) with a mixture of theoretical knowledge in their areas of expertise as well as practical experience gained through on-the-job training at their places of employment.

These formal three-year training programs are offered for hundreds of different “trades” or areas of expertise ranging from masonry to mechatronics. The structure ensures that the trainees leave the program with a depth of theoretical as well as practical knowledge.

Many university graduates do an internship as an entry point for full-time employment after they finish university. These members of “Generation Internship”—which has become a commonly used expression for young interns—are often employed for up to six months at German companies, where they sometimes even replace full-time employees after they have received “on-the-job training.” This is especially true for highly motivated female interns in Human Resources departments who hope to get a full-time job after their internships.

In German companies, it is often the employees who have superior technical knowledge and expertise who get promoted despite the fact that they might have little or no managerial experience.

The common belief is these new managers can easily improve their “soft skills,” e.g., their management and communication skills, by attending appropriate courses and workshops. The most important factor for their promotion is their superior technical skills.

Possible Negative Perception: Arrogant, know-it-all

Outsiders may find the focus on educational achievements and titles rather than on practical experience as yet another example of the German “know-it-all” manner.

People who might have a lot of practical experience in a certain field, or are a “natural” at something but do not have the right diplomas or certificates to prove it, may find the German insistence on professional documentation quite arrogant.

Examples:

It’s particularly difficult for applicants with a migrant background or members of ethnic minority groups to find jobs—or even get an interview—because they often have a hard time “proving” their qualifications. Papers or certificates might have gotten lost or they don’t correspond to German or European Union educational standards and requirements.

Due to the in-depth on-the-job training and the thorough and specialized academic education of German workers and employees, there is a sense of “I know what I’m doing. I’m the expert. Don’t tell me what to do.” Especially when combined with the type of direct communication style preferred by most Germans, this attitude can come across as self-righteous, arrogant, or know-it-all.

Sustainability:

Germans are aware of the limited availability of the country’s natural resources and the necessity to protect the resources they have for future generations. They are willing to make certain concessions to guarantee a sustainable future, for example, paying more for electricity generated from renewable energy sources.

The focus on sustainability applies to managing scarce resources such as natural resources, clean water, and clean air, as well as utilizing sustainable production and manufacturing processes and technologies. The terms “environmental consciousness” (Umweltbewusstsein) and “environmental protection” (Umweltschutz) are still important in the public debate in Germany. However, the larger concept of long-term sustainability is increasingly being applied to all sectors of society on all levels of public administration, in business and on a personal level.

More and more companies publish “sustainability reports” on their websites in order to show their commitment to the widely held value of sustainability, and to win over an increasingly vocal group of critical consumers as customers.

Germans are whole-heartedly embracing the conservation of resources by making the recycling of all sorts of materials into a science and by reducing the use of resources including energy in innovative and creative ways. Almost every German household and apartment complex has adopted a system of garbage separation demonstrating a clear sense of order by following strict recycling guidelines.

In addition, people take used electronics, furniture, old paint, and other materials to the “recycling center” where they can dispose of these items by paying a small fee.

The German government has made a commitment towards a so-called “energy transition” (Energiewende), passing a complex body of legislation in 2011 that includes ambitious targets for 2050: reducing greenhouse gases by 80-95%, using 60% renewable energies (wind, solar, and biogas), and increasing electricity efficiency by 50%. This energy transition is supported by all parties in the German parliament including left-wing, right-wing, and center parties.

Germany is the world’s leading manufacturer of wind turbines and a pioneer in other forms of renewable energies including photo-voltaic (solar) cells. The focus in automobile production is on fuel-efficient engines and designs even for luxury cars.

Another example of “sustainability” in Germany today has to do with discussions around burnout and stress-related mental illness, including depression, on the job. There is an increasing emphasis on a better work-life balance and a more sustainable way of life. This is reflected in the fact that by law both parents can take time off work (Kinderzeit or children’s time) to be with their newborns.

Huge efforts are being made at the public policy level to provide more gender-neutral career paths enabling women to have both a career and a family.

Possible Negative Perception: Self-righteous

Because many Germans tend to believe that “the right thing” to do is to focus on sustainability at all cost, they are not shy about making their position known to others and trying to convince them to follow their lead. This is not always well received by people from other cultures.

An expat who moved her entire family to Germany for a three-year overseas assignment was more than embarrassed when her neighbor came to her door and told her in no uncertain terms that she and her spouse were doing the recycling incorrectly and asked them to fix the transgression. One of their children had thrown a few old magazines into the glass container, which upset the watchful neighbor greatly. He insisted that she take out the magazines immediately and followed her to the recycling cans in the yard to make sure she fixed the problem right away.

Examples:

If someone does not recycle or wastes resources and energy, they are almost considered an “outlaw” and might get publicly scolded with a moralistic index finger pointed at them.

When someone seems to water their garden excessively or leaves a light burning on the outside of their house during the day, a neighbor might come by and tell them that they are wasting water or electricity, or even scold them for their actions.

ISRAEL values

Values of Israelis: Maximum freedom-Minimum Restrain; Informality; Directness; strong group orientation.

Israelis tend to place a high value on removing or ignoring barriers created by class, status, authority or role. They prefer to relate to people be’govah aynaim that is, at eye level.

Managers are almost always addressed by their first names. Their office doors are usually open, and subordinates may drop in to ask a question, exchange ideas or even offer criticism.

Possible Negative Perception: Lack of respect, rude, or overly familiar

The manner in which workers challenge their supervisors may seem insubordinate, and the ways in which students relate to teachers, enlisted men to officers, and children to parents may give an impression that Israelis lack respect for authority.

Examples:

Israelis often bypass levels of authority in order to secure information or solve a problem.

An Israeli junior manager working on a joint project with Americans sent an e-mail request to a US senior manager two levels higher. In order to put him in his place, the US American manager ignored the junior manager and sent his reply to the junior manager's boss. His action was lost on the Israeli

Confrontation is acceptable, even desirable, since Israelis usually believe that the clash of ideas produces solutions to problems.

For Israelis, the cultural translation of feedback usually is: "Never mind the compliments. Lay on the criticism and forget the frills."

Possible Negative Perception: Aggressive, rude, tactless

If you come from a culture with an indirect style, you may be hurt, overwhelmed, or intimidated by Israeli directness.

Examples:

You are making a marketing presentation to Israeli colleagues. You ask for feedback. Instead of the usual "it seems to me," or "I have a problem with Section 4," you hear, "You're wrong."

When it is your turn to present feedback, you discover that your tactful phrases are interpreted as hesitation or uncertainty. It's hard for you to get your Israeli colleagues to take you seriously.

Risk taking

Israelis are expected to demonstrate initiative, take risks and accept responsibility if things do not turn out as planned.

In both social interactions and the workplace, risk-taking expresses itself in creativity and improvisation. This approach may produce surprises, but Israelis accept surprises and uncertainty as a normal part of life. The high value placed on risk taking also means that Israelis are expected to change what has to be changed, even if it means challenging rules and not "going by the book." Rosh gadol (literally, "big head") is the Israeli slang term for those who are willing to take the initiative, assume responsibility, make decisions, and go beyond their specific job descriptions.

In the workplace, this is expressed in the tendency to try out new approaches even if they have not been thought out carefully. Israelis are used to being rewarded for rosh gadol behavior.

Possible Negative Perception: Overconfident, insubordinate, irresponsible, "out of line" behavior

If you are supervising Israelis, you may find that they don't always follow your instructions to the letter. Israelis are used to being rewarded for taking the initiative and carrying out a necessary task without waiting for consent from a higher-level manager.

Examples:

An Israeli software team was working at the Canadian parent company. The Israeli team chose to work on the vacation days assigned to the Canadians.

When they discovered that the computer system had been shut down for 24 hours for maintenance, the Israeli team leader called Operations and took it upon himself to cancel the maintenance order. The Israelis proceeded with their work and met their deadline.

The Canadians were shocked by the Israeli behavior, especially because it threw off the maintenance schedule.

Strong group orientation

Israelis place a high value on loyalty to one's group and concern for its well being, whether it be a circle of friends, school class, army unit, family, ethnic group, or work team.

Kol Israel arevim za beza. "All Israelis are responsible for one another."

Indicates that any action taken by one member of the group will have consequences for the others. An individual takes responsibility for the whole group's well being.

Many relationships are forged in the army and maintained through adulthood. People who work together usually create strong bonds of friendship and trust. Israelis are used to pulling together as a team and it is one of their strengths. If someone does not share or give to the common goal he is considered unsociable.

Socializing is encouraged and many times transcends the boundaries of work. People who work together usually know each other's spouses, families, and a lot about their personal lives. This type of friendship is one of the important glues holding teams together.

At first glance it may seem that productivity is down because there is so much socializing. For Israelis, socializing actually enhances productivity.

Possible Negative Perception: Wary of outsiders; the insider-outsider phenomenon

The strong emphasis on social interaction can be viewed as ineffective and getting in the way of business.

The Israeli workplace can be perceived as chaotic, noisy, and hectic.

Examples:

When newcomers join a team, especially if they are not Israelis, it takes a while before team members share important information.

Newcomers often feel left "out of the loop," particularly when those within the loop are communicating in Hebrew.

Maximum freedom /minimum restraint

From the time they are children, Israelis are encouraged to be both spontaneous and active. If one has something to say, he or she is expected to say it.

Holding back and hiding one's feelings are viewed negatively. A high value is placed on expressing disagreement, anger, happiness, and enthusiasm.

Israelis are emotionally expressive. They use hand gestures, facial expressions and their voices to emphasize their messages.

Israeli public space is louder, faster-paced and more demonstrative than many other cultures. Israelis have no problem engaging in several activities at once or in improvising plans at the last minute.

Discussions are often very animated. Israelis may gesture emphatically, raise their voices, move around in their seats or stand up and walk around the room. An outsider accustomed to a more restrained style may conclude that the speakers are engaged in a fight. In fact, the Israelis are probably engaged in a lively discussion.

Outsiders may also assume that Israeli business decisions are based primarily on emotion. However, the same managers who feel free about expressing their emotions in a discussion will tend to make business decisions according to rational, objective criteria. Leaders who keep their cool in tight situations and do not allow themselves to be carried away by emotion usually earn the admiration of their peers.

The value of Maximum Freedom, Minimum Restraint also explains Israeli spontaneity and improvisation. If an idea comes to mind, you seize the moment and act on it, even if it isn't part of the plan. You don't stop to consider the ramifications because that might curb creative energy

Possible Negative Perception: Chaos

It may seem that life runs at a frantic pace. Things may appear to be hectic and out of control.

Examples: If you are working with Israeli colleagues, you may feel overwhelmed and bombarded by stimuli. On the surface it may seem that the Israeli workplace is hectic and loud.

When your colleagues start brainstorming, several people may be talking at the same time. A manager may be speaking on the phone, conducting a meeting with you, and dealing with a question from a colleague who has just entered the room.

JAPAN values

Harmony:

Maintaining the appearance of harmony is important. People are often expected to understand one another intuitively and implicitly without much talking or explaining.

Though *kyousou* (competition) and *jikosekinin* (personal responsibility) are strongly promoted in Japan, these values are usually (but, of course, not always) exhibited in the context of harmony.

The many ways to say "no" without directly saying "no" in Japanese; many Japanese will share negative feedback only in private or while drinking.

While Japanese society places a value on harmony and consideration for others, it is important to note that, as anywhere, amongst Japanese there are disagreements, tensions and rivalries.

Possible Negative Perception: Dishonesty

Because Japanese tend to value harmony, when pushed a colleague may say something that is not strictly true in order to preserve a harmonious relationship.

Normally Japanese would not "lie," but would indicate "no" or discomfort to one another in indirect, nonverbal ways such as by sucking air through the teeth.

Examples:

A US American trainer worked in a Japanese office. They usually had ten trainees per workshop, as they did a lot of skill practice.

One day her supervisor told her she'd have 35 trainees the next week. She asked "Why?" He said "Because." After several increasingly heated exchanges, the supervisor said, "Ok, you'll have ten trainees."

The trainer understood that she'd overstepped her bounds—"why" is rather confrontational and insubordinate, especially in an open office situation. There were 35 trainees in the workshop.

Effort:

Hard work is valued.. One should show his or her dedication to work for the success of the group. Visible demonstration of hard work improves team morale and spirit.

Vacation time and shorter work weeks have had to be mandated in order to be taken; a common response to a request is to try, even though one expects failure. Effort is one of the criteria for the performance evaluation.

Possible Negative Perception: Inefficiency

Because Japanese tend to value effort, people may be perceived to be operating inefficiently or wasting time on things that are not the greatest priority. Karoshi, or death by overwork, is a well-known term in Japan. Many Japanese do not take their full holiday time, and in recent years government and industry have had to encourage workers to do so.

Examples:

Many companies still engage in "new year's greetings," during which all customers and suppliers are greeted in person.

This is incredibly time consuming, but indicates the effort you are willing to exert to preserve the relationship.

Situationalism:

Everything depends on the perspective. Appropriate action, decision or response is dictated by who is doing what with whom, when, where, and why. There are few if any universals.

Situationalism includes two kinds of expressions: hon'ne—the expressions of one's inner feelings or personal opinion, and tatemae—one's public or official opinion.

Depending on the situation, one is expected to choose hon'ne or tatemae in order to maintain harmony.

What you say and how you act depend heavily on the situation or T.P.O. (Time, Place, and Occasion). A common answer to a question is, "It depends...."

Japanese language is full of expressions to match various situations such as formal or informal, male or female, insider or outsider, older or younger.

Nonverbal communication, such as the depth of a bow, varies according to the hierarchy as well as differences in public and private space. There is little expectation that one would behave consistently; situational behavior is the norm.

Possible Negative Perception: Inconsistency

Because Japanese tend to value situationalism, a colleague may say one thing in private and another in a meeting, thus giving the impression of dishonesty.

Examples:

A colleague may tell you in private conversation that he very much supports your new proposal (hon'ne). However, in a meeting the next day, he may not publicly support your proposal, in order to conform to the group consensus (tatemae).

Trust is usually built through long-term relationships, and without trust people are reluctant to make any commitment, whether in a business transaction or a personal endeavor. People spend much time and effort, and sometimes money, to maintain relationships.

Ningen kankei has both horizontal (uchi or inside/intimate; soto or outside/stranger) and vertical (joo or higher-status, ge or lower-status) dimensions. Depending on these dimensions, there are different (situational) behavioral codes (or appropriate behaviors) to follow in order to maintain the relationship.

Human Relations:

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Ningen kankei has both horizontal (uchi or inside/intimate; soto or outside/stranger) and vertical (joo or higher-status, ge or lower-status) dimensions.

Depending on these dimensions, there are different (situational) behavioral codes (or appropriate behaviors) to follow in order to maintain the relationship.

People strive for long-term relationships even after moving away by keeping in touch with greeting cards, pictures, and gifts.

When an intermediary introduces two people, there is a tendency to feel responsible for the success of their relationship in order to save the face of the intermediary.

People usually do not show the same courtesies to strangers (on the subway, at the baggage counter in the airport) as they do to those with whom they have a relationship (uchi vs. soto).

A supervisor may contact his or her college classmates and colleagues in other companies in order to help secure a job for an employee during layoffs (using kone or "connection").

A student may demonstrate deference and loyalty to a former teacher years later, even if the student has attained a higher status than the teacher.

Possible Negative Perception: Abuse

A colleague may "count" on you to do something because you are a friend, even though you are unable or don't want to do it. Relationships may obligate people to do things that are not necessarily to their own advantage. It can be difficult for a lower-status or outside person to exert influence.

Examples:

It can be very difficult to get subordinates to speak up and voice their honest opinions in the presence of supervisors. Drinking or socializing together, when well conducted, can open up a flow of more negative information than a supervisor may want to hear!

A subordinate may feel obligated to do as a supervisor requests. A supervisor may hesitate to introduce change into an organization because she or he wants to take care of subordinates and not cause difficulty for them.

Form:

The way of doing something. Knowing the proper way (or protocols) shows one's awareness and experience. It also indicates respect to the person you are dealing with. This value includes jikangenshu, or punctuality.

Most taxi drivers wear white gloves and carry feather dusters; seating order is a very important form, as is business-card exchange.

Most Japanese will arrive to a meeting a minimum of five minutes before the appointed time. If the person you are meeting shows up and you are already there, even if the person joining you also arrives earlier than the appointed time, s/he will say "sorry to have kept you waiting."

Possible Negative Perception: Inflexibility

How things are done or said tends to become so important that people can be misled by the presentation. As a result, the content may become secondary and may suffer.

People may have been so influenced by the way things have always been done that it seems as if improvement or change may never occur.

Examples: Introduction of a new work procedure can be frequently resisted, because it involves detailed retraining of personnel and is therefore both time- and cost-intensive.

Understanding:

Most Japanese value understanding and do not wish to discuss something or comment on it until they have fully understood it. Understanding is usually a first and separate process from agreement or disagreement.

It relates closely to harmony, in that people desire to see the inherent logic of a position and empathize with that, even if they may hold a different position, rather than contradict another.

You ask a colleague for driving directions to a resort you plan to go to that weekend. Your colleague spends much more time with you than you expected, giving you ideas on places to see in the area, where to eat, what to buy, and how to get there more easily by train, in addition to eventually providing you the driving directions you initially requested.

Possible Negative Perception: Frustration

Someone may appear to agree when in fact he or she does not.

A question may be greeted with ten more questions rather than with a response.

A decision that appeared simple may require a long time.

The emphasis on how people feel and the situation in which they operate may appear burdensome and unnecessarily complex.

Examples:

You email a simple question to a Japanese colleague, hoping for a quick response that you can give your supervisor. Rather than an answer to your question, your colleague sends you with a list of questions.

Your colleague does this to be sure he answers your question appropriately and does not mislead you, but you feel it wastes time and makes you look bad to your supervisor.

India values

Family/Community Ties:

Though there has been a gradual shift from living in extended families to living in nuclear families, the relationship to the extended family (consisting of many relatives) remains strong.

It is not uncommon for family ties to influence major career or organizational decisions. This is evidenced in many ways.

An employee may forfeit a lucrative assignment and accept a lesser-paying one in order to be located near parents, or take a long leave to attend a marriage or other family function of a distant relative whom they have only met once.

A young person may join the family business even though he has better career options available.

Possible Negative Perception: Unprofessional Behavior and Favoritism. Family obligations often interfere with one's work responsibilities.

Many times Indians give preference to their kin in organizational matters such as assigning a job, getting admission in a school, rewarding, etc. Preferential treatment can also extend to people from one's own caste or community, while unrelated persons are likely to receive less favourable treatment.

Examples: An employee may arrive late for a meeting because of family commitments, and family members may drop in to visit an employee at work, even though this may not be permitted.

An employee tries his best to get a job for one of his relatives in the organisation, even though the relative may not have the required competence for the job.

Even in successful and professionally run businesses in India, one may find a large number of employees and senior managers belonging to the same community. On the other hand, unrelated persons are likely to receive less favourable treatment.

If pitted against an "outsider," the Indian manager may side with and protect a subordinate's mistakes. Loyalty to one's group (community, department, friends, etc.) tends to be valued over individual achievement.

Personal-Relationship Orientation:

Indians like to form close personal relationships with people they know including colleagues.

One may sometimes find people in India disconcertingly open about themselves with relative strangers, or intrusive about details of the other person's life. Even in formal situations, most Indians do spend time discussing issues related to their personal life.

It is common to invite a colleague's family to one's home so that both families can get to know each other. A congenial atmosphere becomes a prerequisite for doing business and often leads Indians to share personal details about themselves with relative strangers, and to expect others to do the same.

Indians usually address family friends and neighbours, sometimes colleagues also, as if they are members of the family. For instance, children may refer to parents' friends as "Uncle" and "Auntie," or neighbours may be addressed as "Bhai Sa'ab" (elder brother), "Didi" (elder sister), or "Bhabhi" (sister-in-law), etc.

Possible Negative Perception: Conformist and Intrusive

The need to form close relationships predisposes Indians to look for approval from family, friends, and colleagues.

In a meeting, people may not openly and directly disagree with a proposal, even if it is obviously flawed. A subordinate or a colleague usually does not say "no" to a request—even one that he knows that he cannot fulfill.

Examples: Due to their need for personal relationships, Indians often inadvertently violate the personal privacy of others, which can seem intrusive. During a first meeting, a stranger may ask personal questions about the other's job, family, background, etc.

It is common for a colleague or subordinate to just "drop in" to one's home or office without a prior appointment.

Hierarchy Conscious:

Relationships are understood as hierarchical in all contexts, including the vertically ordered caste system, company seniority, job position, gender, and age.

For example, as a senior, one expects that the juniors will follow given advice, guidance, or commands; as a junior, one expects the senior to provide guidance and advice. Whether it's the vertically ordered, four-fold caste system, company seniority, job position, gender, or age, relationships across each dimension are understood as hierarchical.

When addressing a superior, it is normal for Indians to address him or her as "Sir" or "Madam," respectively. Addressing someone using his or her title (e.g., Mrs., Dr., Professor) is also a way of showing respect.

A superior gives an order and expects others to follow it without any questions. Even a query about the rationale of a decision by the subordinate can be seen as a sign of disrespect.

Possible Negative Perception: Submissive and Autocratic

Since Indians tend to expect permission and guidance from those whom they see as superior, they are likely to be perceived as dependent and lacking in self-motivation.

In India, the superior has the responsibility to guide, advise, and take care of those lower in the hierarchy, but also has certain privileges and power over them. To a foreigner, the latter, more visible behaviour is likely to be seen as autocratic.

At work, men tend to be seen as superior to women, while in less culturally "male" environments (e.g., the home) women are considered superior and command respect. Jokes about how husbands are dominated by their wives at home are common.

However, since the workplace is more visible and public, women are seen as being discriminated against—and often they are!

Examples: Even after a superior approves a project and gives the go-ahead signal, a subordinate may keep coming back for advice and guidance.

Often, long after a person has a job and is financially independent, it is appropriate to seek advice from one's parents before making a personal investment decision.

In India, the superior (in position, age, or even, gender) has the responsibility to guide, advise, and take care of those lower in the hierarchy, and also has certain privileges and power over them. The superior may over-rule a proposal by a subordinate, without even trying to understand the rationale. Yet, a superior usually expects the subordinates to seek his/her opinion and permission before taking any action.

A male boss may give a challenging assignment to a male subordinate, even though there is a woman subordinate who is equally, or perhaps more, competent to handle it. In an office meeting, the professional views of a woman executive may be ignored, or at best humoured, even though she has a valid point to make.

Cyclical-Time Orientation:

Unlike many Western cultures, Indians view time as cyclical and recurring ("Kal-Chakra" is the "Wheel of Time"), similar to the seasonal cycles in agriculture. This value expresses itself in the religious doctrine of Birth-Death-Rebirth.

The cyclical-time orientation among Indians is also rooted in the spiritual worldview of "the doctrine of Karma," i.e., one's past deeds (even those from the previous births) determine the present outcomes.

Correspondingly, destiny or fate is often used to explain events and situations.

Most Indian families (even the "modern" ones) show respect for the traditional rituals, which are performed with reverence and conviction.

In many organizations, the next year's budget is prepared by extrapolating the growth and expenditure of the past few years, without adequately taking the future opportunities or threats into account.

Possible Negative Perception: Tardy and Resistant to Change

Accepting time as cyclical implies recurrence of events and opportunities.

As a result, Indians have a relaxed attitude towards time, and feel less a sense of urgency. Present and future are often seen as extensions of the past.

Correspondingly, Indians are more predisposed to—and often rigid in—sticking to the traditions.

Examples: A person may schedule an appointment for a specific time, but when he arrives 20 minutes late, gives no reason or excuse.

Many traditional rituals, even organisational practices, are followed just because they have been done in the past, even though there may not be any present justification for following them. A new proposal may be resisted, or even rejected, despite its merit, because it goes against the past practices and traditions.

This past-orientation among Indians is also rooted in the spiritual worldview of the "doctrine of Karma". A person may not get promoted for successive years, but accepts it as a part of his destiny, and continues to work without any change in behaviour. Indians often attribute destiny or fate to explain many events and situations. An executive may explain the failure of a project or assignment as due to circumstances beyond one's control.

Contextual Worldwide:

In the Indian worldview, things can only be understood holistically. Thus, knowing the personal, social, and historical context of people, events, situations, etc., is seen as necessary to comprehend them. This often makes Indians more holistic in their thinking, and inductive in their problem-solving approach.

In a meeting, the discussion is focused not just on the task at hand, but also encompasses related bits of information, personal details of people involved, related trends, and more.

In a job interview, a candidate may be asked a variety of information that may not be directly related to the job including things such as his/her background, spouse's profession, personal interests and hobbies, likes and dislikes, significant events in his/her life, or opinions about political or social issues.

Possible Negative Perception: Superficial and Lacking Focus

Many foreigners, coming from more deductive and narrowly focused cultures, often find this aspect of Indian behaviour puzzling and exasperating. They perceive it as lacking a logical coherence and direction (they may wonder what an Indian is trying to say).

Indians often feel satisfied if they have understood a situation as a whole, without making much effort to understand the specifics. Thus, they can be perceived as inattentive to detail.

It is also common for one to rely on one's "feel" for the situation or person when making a decision.

Examples: A person may ask questions or share pieces of information that do not seem to be relevant to the discussion. Or when asked about the progress of a project, a person might respond by narrating various seemingly unrelated bits of information before responding to the specific question.

An employee proposing a new venture or project may describe the overall situation and trends to justify it. However, when asked to spell out the specific details (steps to implement, resource requirements, measures, etc.), may be unable to provide information.

A company may foray into a new market because the top management team feels that this is the right time to enter the market. However, the venture fails because planning for the back-up support was not adequate.

Thailand values

Fear of Offending:

The Thai word literally means to consider the heart of the other person, i.e., to seek harmony in interpersonal relationships almost at any cost.

Krengjai is an extreme reluctance to impose on anyone or disturb the personal equilibrium of another person—especially someone more senior in age or rank—by direct criticism, challenge, or confrontation. Whatever may hurt or make another person uncomfortable is to be avoided.

Mai tam hai sia naa.

Do not cause other people to lose face.

Mai tam hai siia khwaam ruesuek.

Do not hurt the feelings of others, not even of those inferior to you.

Krengjai is closely related to the wider concept of “face” found in most cultures in Southeast Asia. Any action or word that might harm the harmony, the ideal state of social relationships, and thus cause “loss of face” to both parties is perceived as automatically undesirable.

Consequently, Thais do not like to reject the ideas of others. They will usually try to soften their opposition, or simply remain quiet in order to avoid an awkward outright rejection of an idea or to avoid presenting bad news.

Most Thais would readily agree that it is better not to say anything than to come forward with criticism or opposition, especially to more senior persons.

Possible Negative Perception: Dishonesty

In order to avoid discomfort, or more seriously, “loss of face”, Thai people tend to resort to words and expressions that may not be strictly true, but that maintain harmony at the workplace or in private life.

Examples:

Based on this fear of offending Thais tend to resort to vague or ambiguous wording (e.g., “we will do our best”, “it may be somewhat difficult”, “perhaps some delay in delivery”), or sometimes to statements that to outsiders appear to be outright lies.

Such words and statements are not intended to be deceitful. People who are familiar with the Thai culture will be able to “read between the lines”.

Respect for Hierarchy:

The expression literally means “low place and high place”; Thais tend to perceive just about everything in terms of a hierarchical system. People can be “high” or “low” according to their age, position in the family, occupation, education or professional rank. Throughout the centuries, Thai society has been based on the acceptance of power and authority resting with certain individuals.

The form of traditional government and social structure in Siam was the sakdina system, a system that was similar to that of a feudal society. All land was owned by the king, who granted land and other rights (sakdina or “dignity marks”) to members of the royal family and the nobility according to their ranks in the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy. Thus questionable or even corrupt practices have, in the past, often been disregarded as they have been seen as “rights” due to rank.

Even today, government officials and business executives are usually treated with very high respect, based solely on their position (which, in a Buddhist context, can also be explained and justified in terms of accumulated merit through earlier lives). Being wealthy has been seen as honourable and those who possess money, whatever means they might have used to acquire it, have often been lifted up and praised. For this reason, the well-intentioned legislation to deal with corruption and bring to justice individuals who suddenly become ruay phit pokati (unusually wealthy) has failed to make a real impact on Thai society.

There is yet another form of hierarchy in Thai society based on age. As in many other countries in Asia, older people are looked upon with respect, and they in turn consider it their responsibility to guide and look after younger people. Very often in a typical Thai office environment, employees call each other “older sister/brother” (phi), “younger sister/brother” (nong), or “uncle/aunt” (loong/pa).

Possible Negative Perception: Arrogance

Persons in positions of authority, in government as well as in business life, are exposed to the temptation to interpret the respect shown to them as an invitation to abuse power.

Examples:

This rather uncritical acceptance of privileges based on wealth and status may perhaps also explain why Thailand, which has never been colonised and which adopted a reasonably modern constitution in the early 1930s, still has not managed to implement a system of checks and balances 70 years later.

In political life (where politicians and their relatives can almost never be brought to justice, whatever their crime) and to some extent in the business context as well (where tycoons repeatedly display their wealth with contempt for the poor), this state of affairs has tended to foster a climate of “invincibility and infallibility” that may be perceived as pure arrogance.

Relativism:

Respect for authority and krongjai create a web of social obligations and unwritten rules where everything is laew tae, i.e., depends on circumstances. Consequently, the appropriate course of action at any given time will depend on the status of the relationships and the context in which the interaction takes place.

When a superior asks a subordinate to recommend a decision, the answer will often be laew tae (literally, “it depends on circumstances”), as Thais, in the spirit of krongjai referred to above, do not want to offend. In a business context this means that during a formal meeting Thai subordinates will feel uncomfortable in expressing their opinions until they are certain that their opinion is in line with that of their superiors. It may be acceptable to disagree with a superior in private, but almost never during a formal meeting.

Possible Negative Perception: Indecision

In business life, some customers receive fantastic treatment while others are ignored; some tasks are given top priority and others are not attended to; some meetings are highly efficient, others are a waste of time.

Examples: As a wrong decision or an opinion at a variance with that of a superior almost always leads to censure or punishment, attitudes like ambiguity, being uncommitted and “sitting-on-the-fence” are perceived by Thais as virtues.

To outsiders it may look like plain indecision—and sometimes it is.

Gratitude:

This concept is closely related to phrakhun or benevolence. Exercise of authority is expected to go hand-in-hand with boonkhun, gratitude/obligation.

Through an intricate system of patron-client relationships superiors and elders are looked to for protection and special benefits.

In a business context, “strange” decisions are made from time to time because someone owes someone else a favour for past deeds. In order to swing a decision in a certain direction, a person who has granted favours in the past could remind the decision-maker of these past favours.

This phenomenon has almost no time limitations; Thais have a remarkable ability to remember.

However, in a situation involving loss of face or negative sentiments, Thais have an equally remarkable ability to forget such negative episodes immediately, and they do not like to be reminded about them.

Possible Negative Perception: Corruption

This web of mutual obligations is open to abuse and has often been perceived by outsiders as the prime factor behind corruption in political and business life.

Examples: Thai political life, and to some extent Thai business life, have had notorious examples of corrupt practices. However, these practices almost always involved repaying personal debt (gratitude).

If a contract gets awarded for questionable reasons in Thailand, it is most often for relationship reasons, i.e., repaying an old favour, rather than for monetary reasons.

Never Mind:

One of the first expressions expatriates learn in the Thai language, mai pen rai, means literally “it does not matter” or “no worries” and represents the basic attitude of many Thai people in not taking things too seriously.

In situations where others would get upset, angry or furious, most Thais tend to keep jai yen (literally, “cool heart”), smile and say, mai pen rai.

In Buddhist teachings much emphasis is laid on the principle of thaang saai klaang, “the middle of the road”.

In popular Thai Buddhism it is interpreted as a commandment not to show one’s feelings, since suffering is associated with extreme emotions.

Possible Negative Perception: Detachment

Because display of any emotion, not only negative ones, is considered inappropriate in traditional Thai society and conflict avoidance is so crucial, the Thai workplace may suggest lack of commitment, aloofness or lack of discipline.

Examples: Though Thai people may sometimes get emotionally involved in sports events (e.g., Thai boxing, football/soccer) or illegal gambling, negating everything said above concerning thaang saai klaang, in other areas of life the mai pen rai mindset puzzles many outsiders.

When, for example, a team member at the workplace reports that she/he has failed to do her/his part of a joint assignment, somebody is likely to respond, mai pen rai.

To those not acquainted with Thai culture it sounds irresponsible and indicates detachment. The team members are, of course, upset and unhappy with the situation, but to show it publicly would not be appropriate.

Easygoing, Comfortable:

Most Thais do not like pressure. They generally enjoy life and put high emphasis on social interaction, well-being, and fun.

In most areas of life, Thais tend to postpone tasks that are seen as boring or routine until the very last minute, and they sometimes overlook deadlines.

When faced with a tough deadline, they will often have to work very hard to achieve even average results. This easygoing attitude, however, does not mean that “anything goes” in Thailand. Thais are, for example, extremely sensitive about religious objects including statues of Lord Buddha, which should be treated with the utmost respect.

Moreover, there are cultural taboos attached to the various parts of the human body, and people seeking to understand Thai culture should keep this in mind. More information can be found in several of the books listed in the bibliography.

Possible Negative Perception: Disorder

Outsiders tend to see Thais as having a problem with time management and deadlines.

Examples: An example could be a highly publicised and high-profile construction project that everyone knew could not possibly be finished on time, but nobody wanted to announce the delay.

Once it became obvious that the project was delayed and there was a lot of “loss of face” for all parties involved, it was still felt that the “head-in-the-sand” approach was not wholly inappropriate, as the illusion was nice while it lasted.

Egypt - values

Tradition & Dignity

Egyptians are proud of their rich history and tradition. This pride is reflected on multiple levels culturally, organizationally, and individually.

This pride is often expressed in collective declarations (“Egyptians invented this item or this idea”) or in a manner that shows the prestige of a particular organization or institution (“Our university was the first in the Middle East to set up an exchange program with universities in Western Europe”).

Pride extends to the concept of “face”; it is of utmost importance to preserve the dignity and reputation of one’s groups (professional and social) and of oneself.

Egyptians generally strive to present their best “face” and often go to great lengths, both verbally and through presentation, to “showcase” this sense of pride and security in collective tradition and personal accomplishments

Tradition and dignity function on many levels in Egyptian culture. Egyptians often go to great lengths to preserve the dignity of self, family, and group, especially in public contexts.

One example of this is a young man who had his PhD and told his family that he was being considered for a big promotion at his university. The next announcement that circulated to his extended family and social and professional groups was that he had won a highly selective fellowship to teach abroad for two years.

There was no mention of the promotion, but all understood that he did not get the promotion, and his family waited until he earned another notable award before announcing any updated information on his career.

Possible Negative Perception: Excessive Pride

Egyptians’ focus on their contributions to history and pride in their accomplishments may come across as boastful or arrogant to some.

Although this is not the intention, offering this information openly may make others think the Egyptians are engaging in a game of one-upmanship.

Examples: In some cultures failure to be selected for an award or promotion does not compromise one’s public dignity, as it is expected that there are multiple candidates and not all can win. To members of these cultures, withholding information about such decisions seems unnecessary or even deceitful.

To members of future-oriented cultures, Egyptian pride and emphasis on past accomplishments may appear to compensate for a perceived lack of recent contributions to the sciences or other world arenas.

Hierarchy & Formality:

Hierarchy is based on age, gender, education, experience, and ascribed status. It is customary to use titles when addressing individuals and to respect the “vertical collectivistic” structure that exists within Egyptian society.

Egyptians often acknowledge hierarchy, and openly praise others for their status and accomplishments. Most Egyptians strive for a balance between upholding this importance on power and status, and on developing social relationships that are comfortable and welcoming.

Maintaining the hierarchical social structure is important to most Egyptians, and is indicated through many social practices. Formality in using titles is often observed even in informal social situations among close friends or family.

Egyptians may refer to their friends or family members using titles such as “Dr.” and the person’s first name. Egyptians see this practice as respectful and relationally connecting.

Possible Negative Perception: Overly Formal

The focus on maintaining the social structure may come across as unnecessarily formal to non-Egyptians.

Because of the Egyptian emphasis on status, there are many implicit social sanctions and practices that can make others feel somewhat stifled.

Examples:

To non-Egyptians, using titles in this manner may seem like an unnecessary emphasis on the person’s education level or professional status, and may lead to the perception that people are more distant than they really are.

Relational Loyalty:

Relationships are of primary importance to most Egyptians. Boundaries between professional and social relationships are often blurry and Egyptians tend to find comfort in taking time to develop strong social bonds as part of business dealings.

Personal questions unrelated to business tasks are often considered appropriate and serve as a valuable tool in building relationships. Planning time to socialize within business transactions is common and expected.

A result of this view of relationships is a strong expectation of loyalty from business associates. If business dealings were transferred to another company as a result of market forces or financial savvy, it would offend many Egyptians and, in their eyes, devalue an unwritten relational pact.

This value also involves hospitality. Spending time socializing is important to most Egyptians, and they genuinely enjoy accommodating and pleasing others. Their warm and generous hospitality is often the most memorable quality of interacting with Egyptians.

The expectation of relational loyalty is a powerful influence on Egyptian relationships, both personal and professional. Some would characterize Egyptians as lacking a category for acquaintance—you are a stranger until I meet you or work with you, and then we are friends.

This developing friendship continues over time, even if the individuals rarely see one another. When friends meet, there are often expressive greetings and happy reunions.

Visitors to Egypt often experience warm and generous hospitality, even from people they meet for the first time. One

example is the practice of many shopkeepers who offer tea to shoppers, inviting them to sit, relax and enjoy conversation with them.

The main purpose of these tea offers is not to gain immediate business from the shoppers, but to begin developing a relationship that will hopefully continue and expand.

Possible Negative Perception: Unclear Boundaries

This expectation of relational loyalty and making time to socialize may appear to blur the boundaries between personal and professional interactions. These overlapping relationships may make some people uncomfortable, and it may seem like Egyptians are not maintaining an appropriate detachment in professional transactions.

Examples: To some who are not accustomed to these fluid boundaries, there can be discomfort and confusion. For example, there are situations in which a colleague may not actually want to develop the friendship further, but prefers to remain on business terms with a certain level of detachment.

A corporate trainer recounts that she feels uncomfortable when clients continuously bring her gifts, and is challenged to maintain professional boundaries under these circumstances.

Inshallah:

This Arabic phrase meaning “By the will of God” or “If God wills it” drives interaction and forms the foundation of the typical Egyptian approach to life for both Muslims and Christians.

Most Egyptians uphold this fatalistic view that everything is controlled by God’s higher power, and it is common in business dealings to verbally recognize God’s hand in all aspects of life.

In many ways, such religious phrases unify Egyptians and promote feelings of group harmony. This reliance on a higher power is one of the foundations of their communication approach.

Agreements are often more informal than contractual.

Inshallah is used as a customary response in almost any circumstance: when parting from a friend and mentioning plans to meet again soon, when negotiating a business contract, when discussing family matters, and when expressing desires to come to agreement on an issue—even amidst obvious differences of opinion.

Possible Negative Perception: Non-committal

The Egyptians’ emphasis on God’s will in all activities may seem to be avoiding binding obligations and may appear to be an easy way out of making more formal commitments. To non-Egyptians, in turning everything to God’s hands, Egyptians appear to be honoring their reverence for God, while avoiding personal accountability for follow-through.

Examples: This "Inshallah approach" to life may appear to others as an avoidance strategy. For example, one counselor who worked with Egyptian clients noted that even though he appreciated the cultural meaning and use of Inshallah, he heard it so often that he became frustrated that his clients did not seem to be taking responsibility for, or control of, their actions and treatment potential. In some cases, he felt that the Inshallah attitude tended to shut down his clients’ further exploration of potential solutions to their problems.

No Problem!

Egyptians are known for their “It’s no problem!” attitude. They will often use this phrase, mish mooshilla! (“no problem!”) when interacting with others both personally and professionally. This value is found in the business world as well as in social settings.

It relates to Egyptians’ perceptions of time as flexible and “loose.” Egyptians typically view time in a polychronic, holistic

sense, rather than in a segmented structure. They are often more open and flexible with their time, preferring to focus on relationships over clocks.

They recognize situations that are rather time-bound (such as scheduled university exams) and those that are more loosely time-based (such as social commitments). They have confidence that they can complete assigned tasks and appointments, but do not feel bound to the pressures of time ticking.

While acceptable Egyptian communication patterns include both indirectness and directness (depending on the circumstances and the relationship), indirect communication messages are fairly common for Egyptians in business transactions. Rather than stating “no” outright, Egyptians may use language that is more vague and that suggests that a problem can be easily resolved.

Most Egyptians adopt a relatively lighthearted approach to life and value humor at all levels of interaction. They are proud of their Arabic language and of the many ways they manage life through their verbal expressions. Joke telling is a common social interaction technique, and Egyptians often incorporate humor into the ways they handle business and life in general. Many Egyptians will not directly state that they cannot complete something by a certain deadline, but rather will reassure the others that it is “no problem” and that it will get completed.

An example of this effusive and prolonged, indirect communication style can be observed in the service sector. If a visitor is doing business with a sales person and asks for a product the sales person does not have on hand, rather than saying “no,” the sales person will go to great lengths to get the product. During this wait, the sales person will entertain the visitors, insist that they have more tea, sit and relax, all the while assuring the visitors that the requested product is on its way. In the end, they may bring a product that is similar to the one requested, but perhaps not exactly what was requested.

This value extends to humor. There are many expressions in Arabic that Egyptians commonly use to explain life experiences. Egyptians love to use humor, particularly joke-telling, when interacting with others.

Viewing time in a more open format can cause conflicts when Egyptians work with people who have a more structured impression of time. One Egyptian recounts how her non-Egyptian friends get frustrated when she is late to meet them, claiming that their friend must not respect their time very much or she wouldn't be consistently late.

The Egyptian friend approaches this issue from another perspective, asserting that it would be disrespectful of a third party friend's time if she didn't stop on the way to chat with her and if she chose not to answer a phone call knowing it would cause further delay.

Possible Negative Perception: Inefficiency

Because Egyptians are known for their excessive hospitality and desire to accommodate another person's every need, they may appear to sacrifice efficiency for the sake of pleasing others.

Examples: To people who come from cultural backgrounds that do not place as much emphasis on taking time to please others, this Egyptian value may seem unnecessarily inefficient. In a non-Egyptian's eye, a great deal of time can be “wasted” on accommodating others.

You Better Bargain:

Historically, the foundation of Egyptian business was based on trading and bargaining. This remains true in much of the Egyptian business world today.

It is often difficult to get a straight answer when trying to complete a business transaction. Egyptians can be very expressive and direct in their approach to negotiating, but their emphasis on making others happy and maintaining

relational harmony informs their approach to business. A person's social connections and networks play an important part in business and social dealings.

"For my sake" The idea is that people should bargain with you and accept your offer simply because of who you are—your relationship with the person. Egyptians use this expression frequently when trying to negotiate what they want from friends, colleagues, business associates, or salespeople. It also relates to the 'Relational Loyalty' value. It is one of the expressions most commonly heard when people are negotiating in Arabic.

The bargaining approach commonly employed by many Egyptians suggests that they perceive everything to be negotiable. From this perspective, rules only serve as guidelines, but they do not necessarily apply to each individual person or circumstance. The common Egyptian custom of tipping individuals to provide specialized services or preferential treatment is one example of this value.

Skillful bargaining techniques are highly valued. An immigrant relocation specialist observed that some of her Egyptian clients truly believed that good negotiation skills could get them whatever they wanted, such as payment extensions and paperwork exceptions.

Possible Negative Perception: Bribery

Egyptians' fluid approach and their belief that most things are negotiable may appear to stretch professional boundaries too far. The Egyptian approach to negotiating, sometimes bringing in personal connections and past experiences, may be perceived as undue influence.

Examples: A negative perception of this bargaining approach is that it can seem inequitable and manipulative to outsiders.

In countries where rules are seen as applying to all people universally, it is against the law to apply particularistic standards, and Egyptians could get into serious trouble when working across such cultural differences.